

# The Young Scientifics

Book 1

## Return to the Dinosaur Planet



**COUSIN SUMMERS**



*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

# Return to the Dinosaur Planet

Cousin Summers



**Summers Island Press**

Thorne Bay, Alaska

*Cousin Summers*

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*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

To those who love science...may you discover it is the  
most mysterious truth of all.

*Cousin Summers*

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

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*Cousin Summers*

*“Imagination is everything. It is the preview  
of life's coming attractions.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## DINOSAUR HUNTER

“Hi. My name is Peter Baker. And I...am a dinosaur hunter.”

About that time, I heard pounding on the door and had to turn off the camera. I thought having my room up here in the attic would give me a little peace and quiet when I was trying to record my episodes. Wrong. You could still hear almost everything that was going on downstairs. Sometimes even stuff that was happening outside.

“Open up, Petie, Emergency!”

“What kind?” I hollered back before unlocking the door.

“I lost my walking stick!”

I opened up and my sister tumbled in. “Pearl, do you realize you have some kind of emergency every time I hang up my ‘on the air’ sign? Where is Dad, anyway?”

“In the laundry room. Washing clothes for his first



day at work tomorrow.”

“So, why didn’t you ask him?”

“He said if I leave the top off my bug habitat one more time, I’d have to keep it in the garage.” She lifted the brim of her red ball cap high enough to look at me from under it. “Please, Petie?”

“OK, but don’t call me that.” I started down the stairs and she tagged after me. “It’s a new place and it’d be nice if everybody didn’t call me Petie, like they did back home.”

“I’ll try but it just pops out. I had to lock Mr. B in the bathroom while I got my bugs back. Now he’s madder than blazes!”

“He’ll shred up the toilet paper, again.”

“But I didn’t want him to eat my walking stick!”

“Probably just hiding in Mom’s bamboo plant.”

“I looked there, already. Do you think he’ll kill himself if he jumps off the balcony?”

“It would take him till bedtime to go that far. Better close the slider just in case, though.” We took a shortcut through Dad’s office to get to her room, and she looked at all the boxes of books that still hadn’t been unpacked, yet.

“Boy, I hope he’s not in one of those.” she said.

“Me, too. I’ve got other things to do today besides bug hunts.”

“Like making movies?”

“It’s not a movie, Pearl, it’s documentary show. How come you didn’t close your door right away? Now, he could be anywhere.”

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“By the time I made my sandwich he was gone, already.”

“Did you check the closet?” Pearl’s room looked like a tornado hit it. “Never mind, it’s obvious. You better put all that stuff back before Dad sees.”

“I wish Mom was here!”

“I wish she was, too, but we just have to deal with it.” I unhooked a flashlight from my belt and crawled under the bed.

“Dad said Africa’s only for adults.” She was right behind me instead of putting clothes away. “Is Mom tired of us?”

“No. It’s just what she said. A chance to work on a special project over there. Be home before you know it. Back up, will you? There’s nothing under here.”

“Want to look in the kitchen where I made my sandwich?”

“I’m going for the drapes, first. They like to climb on things. I only started under the bed because it’s Mr. B’s favorite place to bring—” Her mouth dropped open and she looked about to bawl. “Don’t worry, there’s nothing here.” I said it quick before she let loose. Because once she starts a crying fit it’s liable to last half an hour.

“I wish Mom was here!”

“Try to think of something else. Like all the cool stuff we get to do this summer. Free passes to the zoo and everything.”

“I’m not going to be happy till she gets back.”

“Pearl, that’s not true. I could think of something

right now that would make you happy. Two things, in fact.” I stood up and clipped the flashlight back onto my belt.

“What are they?”

“Number one, I found your walking stick.” I lifted the strange-looking bug off the tangle of yellow hair that was sticking out from under the back strap of her ball cap. “Saw it when you turned around just now.”

“Yay!” Instant change. “Thanks, Pete!”

“Better put him back. Too much walking will give him a heart attack. He’d rather just act like a stick.”

“OK, come on, Stinky.” She took him off my finger and headed for the wood and wire habitat box in the corner of her room.

“You named him Stinky? Man, you could have at least called him Sticky, or Mr. Stix, or something.”

“I like Stinky better. What’s number two?”

“Number two? Oh, yeah. Number two is I’m going to help you put all these clothes back before Dad finds out you wrecked everything he organized for you, yesterday. Are you happy, now?”

“I’m so happy I’m static.”

“You mean ecstatic.”

“No, I mean static. You know, like what the radio does when you can’t find a station.”

“Nope. Don’t see the connection. But come on, let’s get busy, I’m wasting daylight.”

“Emily Pearl Baker—” Dad’s voice thundered down the hallway. “Come clean up all this toilet paper your cat pulled off the roll!”

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“Uh-oh.” She slammed the lid down on her habitat box and hurried out.

By the time I got the clothes back in the closet, everything had settled down, again. It was dusk, but still enough natural light for good filming. So I headed back to the attic before it all disappeared. There would be just enough time to introduce the tools of my trade. Then tomorrow, I could take the camera to the museum and get a few shots of the dinosaur exhibits.

Not an actual dig like I was planning on. I’d have to improvise somehow. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t too happy about Mom going to Africa without us, either. Every summer since I could remember we went on a dig for dinosaur bones. Together. We are a family of dinosaur hunters and I’m good with that.

Then Dad got an offer to work at this huge museum in Jefferson City about the same time Mom finally got a visa to work at some remote dig in Africa. That’s when they decided Pearl and I should be normal kids for one summer, instead of kid scientists.

Thing is, I like being a kid scientist. Not to mention I got the best idea ever for the Young Scientist Contest that the university (where my parents worked) puts on every year. It came to me in a flash and I really think I could win it this time. In my division, anyway. Eleven to thirteen.

I’m twelve and the competition can be pretty stiff when all of us have scientists for parents. Most of the kids that enter have been using their brains since they were tots. Hildie Martin (whose mom is a chemistry

professor), won the last one. It was for coming up with a formula for bio-fuel that could run a motorized bicycle. Only for twenty minutes before she had to re-fuel, but it was enough to win her the grand prize. A scholarship to Space Camp, a three-day trip to Disney World with her whole family, and a bunch of other stuff, too.

I won second in my division. It was for a life-size model of a dig site that I put real dinosaur bones in. I used my whole collection on that thing. All the ones I dug up, myself. I worked on it for months and it was totally cool. Right now, I have it set up in a corner of my attic and use it as a backdrop for my documentary show. It's going to be about me, the kid dinosaur hunter.

Which is true because I've been helping my parents on their real dinosaur hunts ever since I learned how to dig. I love to dig. And I have dug up real dinosaur bones. But there's a lot more to dinosaur hunting than just digging. Exciting stuff. And that's what I'll be putting in my show. I call it *Dinosaur Planet*. How cool is that? I'm only on the first episode but I know where I'm going with it. Like I say, it came to me all in a flash. Right after I won second prize in last year's Young Scientist Contest.

Second prize in my division was a video camera kit. The whole outfit. Camera, tripod, case, and an editing program to go with it. I dinked around almost till school was out just learning how everything worked. So, now I'm ready t roll.

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Except this unexpected move we had to make for Dad's new museum job and not going on a dig this year was a bummer. Now, there's only a couple weeks left to get my entry in. Something I could do easy if I was on my own. Only I'm not.

See, our family believes we all have to work together. Especially when one of us has something special going on. Like Mom's Africa dig that she's been waiting years for. So, until she comes back, I have to step in and cover for her. Which means keeping an eye on Pearl every day at the museum while Dad's working.

No problem. I've been keeping an eye on Pearl ever since I can remember. The thing is, Dad added something extra this summer, on account of Mom being gone. We have to do one "normal kid" activity every day. Tomorrow, it's the zoo. So, here's what I figure. When we get to the rainforest animals, I'll try to get a couple shots of how the planet might have looked when dinosaurs lived all over it.

Of course, it was a lot warmer back then, but you can't see heat on a movie. I might have to add in a little steam for special effects, though. I can do that with my editing program. No kidding. I can even do zero gravity with that thing. Not that I would need anything like that on *Dinosaur Planet*. Just saying. Anyway, I had it all figured out.

What I didn't have figured out was Pearl.

*“The true sign of intelligence is not  
knowledge but imagination.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE MISSING PEARL

Pearl has a way of stirring up trouble like blowing bubbles in your milk. No matter how little milk you have in the glass you can still blow it right out the top. It takes a lot of special skills to handle her because she isn't your ordinary kid sister. On account of she's only eight years old and she's a genius, already. No kidding.

She knew how to read since she was three, and she reads everything in sight. Even labels. Added to the fact that she practically has a photographic memory, she's like a walking encyclopedia. Thing is, she doesn't always have the understanding to go along with it. She has no idea what's important and what isn't most of the time.

Not to mention she can drive you crazy if she doesn't have a project to work on. But, hey, I've got that covered, too. I'm going to make her assistant camera operator on my documentary show. Which at least ought to work long enough to finish one episode. That's all I need for my contest entry. Pearl's attention

span works at warp speed.

The Jefferson City Museum is a museum to beat all museums. I mean, it isn't only a museum--it's an institution. Buildings all over the place, with a park in the middle, and even a zoo. On our first day, it looked bigger than the moon and for a minute, we all sat in the car after we parked. Just staring at it.

"Before you get started..." Dad pushed his glasses farther back on his nose, like he always did when he had something important to say. "We need to talk about what to do in an emergency."

"Just call 911," Pearl almost bounced off the seat she was so excited. "Let's go – let's go!"

"If anything happens," Dad went on, "or in case you get lost..."

I held the brochure up to remind him. "There's a map in the back of this."

"My office is on the third floor of the natural history building. We'll walk up there first so you can get your bearings from there. You've got the new phone number keyed in on your cell phone, right?"

"Right."

"You can call me if something comes up. Or you can ask any of the security guards or museum workers, and they'll help you out, too."

We went in a back entrance, down a couple of corridors, and then up three stories in an elevator. When we got there, Pearl started looking for bugs in the potted plant in the office area while Dad put an "X" mark on my map where the natural history building was. After



that, there was the usual "take care of your sister and don't do anything stupid" talk.

Then we were on our own.

We hardly got out the door before Pearl said, "The zoo, Petie—come on!"

"That's practically a mile from here. We should film the dinosaur exhibit, first."

"I want to see some live animals. I'm tired of dinosaurs."

"We'll have to come back early, then, because I have to get those shots, today."

"I promise to help after the gorillas. I'm too static about dinosaurs, right now."

"Ecstatic. I know you didn't forget that word, already. And you mean you're not ecstatic about dinosaurs, right now, or you'd be helping me film my show, first."

"No, I mean I'm not on the dinosaur channel. Like a radio station, remember? I'm tuned-in to gorillas, today. Everything else is static."

"You can say that, again."

"I want to see some gorillas."

"Whatever. We're wasting daylight."

Knowing she could drag this kind of conversation on forever, I decided to give in. Things work out better with Pearl if you just deal with the important stuff. So, we'd go to the zoo. I knew how to find it once we got outside. But how the heck were we supposed to get out of the natural history building? This building was a maze of corridors.

We didn't come in the front door. Just some little staff entrance close to Dad's office. Then we came up a couple floors. So, the first elevator we found, I pushed the down button.

"Wait!" Pearl grabbed my arm like I was maybe holding my hand out to a live rattlesnake instead of an elevator button. "This isn't the same one!"

"What difference does it make? It's an elevator. They all go up and down."

I have to admit, if I hadn't been in such a hurry to get the zoo thing over with, I'd have paid more attention. But about that time, I was thinking I could at least catch some shots of the rainforest habitats, and was busy wondering where they might be. So, when we stepped in, I just pushed the number one button, figuring to find the main entrance to this building, first.

There's not much to look at in an elevator, so I stared at the control panel while the thing rumbled down really slow. A lot slower than the one we came up on. It was bigger, too. Looked like you could put the whole back end of a brontosaurus in there, and maybe even--

"Holy macaroni, Petie!" Pearl yelled loud enough to scare the juice out of me. "It says, basement levels 1, 2, 3!"

She was right. This was a freight elevator, and it was headed for the lowest basement level of the natural history museum. What's worse, the door was probably going to pop open before we could get it headed back up, again. But I gave it my best shot and hit the number

three button about five times, anyway.

Maybe I better explain something, here.

Most museums own a lot more stuff than they can use at one time. So, they store the extra things in the basement. Besides that, they have all the items that haven't been cleaned, cataloged, or made into exhibits, yet. That stuff gets stored there, too. Usually in the same packing crates it came there in. The bigger the museum, the bigger and more dangerous the basement.

I say dangerous because the sort of things you find in a natural history basement are skeletons, mummies, and stuff with curses on them. Things people collected out of old pyramids and tombs. You just never know.

Once, I read this story about a guy who opened up a box that was supposed to have some old Indian artifacts in it from South America. Along with the artifacts was this king size, poisonous tarantula that jumped out and bit him when he took the lid off. He didn't die or anything, but just thinking about it gave me the creeps.

There are even rumors that the ghosts from those tombs walk around at night. Not that I believe in that sort of stuff. But I would have felt a lot better if we had ended up in the basement of the space center or the art building. All we'd have to worry about then would be old airplanes and dusty pictures.

"Call Daddy!" Pearl insisted.

"No way. I am not going to call Dad just to tell him we took a wrong turn. Don't worry, I'll get you out of here. All we have to do is wait till it stops and ride up, again."

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“I don’t want to see what it looks like out there!”

“Close your eyes, then. And don’t open till I tell you.”

I didn’t tell her I wasn’t going to look, either. I’ve got enough stuff rolling around in my brain to invent nightmares with, and I’m sure not looking for more. So, I waited until her eyes were closed and then closed mine, too. Can’t be too careful, if you know what I mean.

Just in time.

The elevator stopped and the big doors rumbled open. A chilly breeze hit my face that smelled like old musty things. Man. I felt like that door was open forever. Why wasn’t it closing? Then it hit me. This was a freight elevator. The door probably wouldn’t close until I pushed the right button. Now, I would have to open my eyes. There was no other way. What I saw when I finally did, scared me a lot worse than catching a glimpse of some old ghost.

Pearl was gone...I mean, she had totally disappeared!

*“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## FOOTPRINTS AND MUMMY EYES

I guess if I would have ever seen a real mummy, I wouldn't have been so nervous about running into one. And let's face it, I was nervous. Because on the other side of that elevator door was Egypt. Not the hot desert kind of Egypt, the cold creepy tomb kind of Egypt. Like being lost in one of those pyramids.

That's because right across from the elevator, leaning against the wall, was a great big piece of one of those tombs. I knew what it was on account of all the strange marks and pictures of flat guys dancing all over it. Just like in my history book for Miss Griffin's class last year.

“Pearl?” I whispered and stuck my head out to see down the hall. “Pearl, get back here— this is no place for games!”

That hall was so long it got dark before you could see all the way to the end. And there were lots of shadowy things along the walls that I couldn't make

out. I didn't really want to know what they were. More tomb things, probably, and maybe even a mummy. Anyway, nothing was moving down there and Pearl hadn't been gone long enough to get out of sight, yet.

The other end of the hallway took an immediate right turn. Since that was the only direction she could have disappeared so quick, I took a deep breath and headed out. Not that I 'm so brave. But I was starting to feel like something awful had happened to Pearl.

She doesn't like museum basements, any more than I do.

There was a dim overhead light at the corner. No tomb stuff against the walls--thank heaven. Just a closet of some kind that said "maintenance" on it, and about halfway down, a sort of spaceship-like glow coming off the side of the wall.

Creepy.

"Emily Pearl Baker," I said out loud, "you better answer me, or --"

There was a loud hum coming from that light. The closer I got, the louder it got, and about the time I figured there must be an underground tunnel to the space building and some kind of a droid had escaped, I saw what it really was.

An old busted coke machine.

In an alcove. It had a sign on it that said, "out of order" and there was a great big puddle of water spreading out all over the floor. The weird light was coming from the purple background of a lit up picture of a cold drink that said, "the real thing" under it.

Sheesh.

It just goes to show you how a person can get all worked up over nothing. I mean, I even had thoughts of aliens flashing through my mind before I saw what it really was. I wasn't half as afraid after that. What was I doing letting myself believe in all that heebie-jeebie stuff, anyway? Did I really think a big modern museum like this--that had a space building--was going to be sitting on top of a haunted basement? I had to get a grip on myself.

Except it wasn't like Pearl to take off and ditch me like this. Especially when most of the time she's glued to me like an extra shadow. Then, all of a sudden, I felt cold water seeping into my shoe. I was standing smack in the middle of that puddle. I hopped on through to the other side, and that's when I saw them.

Footprints.

They were Pearl's, all right. I recognized the design on the bottom of her shoes. Which would have made me feel a whole lot better if I hadn't seen someone else's footprints there, too. Someone with bare feet. And the biggest toes you've ever seen. What kind of a person would be walking around in a cold basement with bare feet? And what kind of a person could whisk Pearl away without so much as a peep?

That definitely wasn't like Pearl.

She was always screaming or hollering about something. If she was kidnapped, she'd be screaming her head off about now. That's when I heard two loud screams. Shrieks is more like it, one right after the

other. The first one was Pearl, but the other...

“Pearl!” I ran down the hallway to the next corner and followed the footprints that went left. “Where are you?”

“Over h-here!” I heard her voice from somewhere farther down.

Thump, squish – thump, squish – that’s how I sounded as I ran down the hall with one wet shoe. When I finally caught up to Pearl, she was standing as still as a statue. Right next to a giant gold box that was leaned up against the wall. Staring at it with her mouth open. And she was squeezing the lunch bag so tight the sandwiches were all probably squashed inside.

“Pearl –” I tried to catch my breath. “Why did you run off like that?”

“I didn’t!” she whispered, with her eyes still glued to the box.

That box had a weird looking head on it. Holy smokes – it was a mummy face! That gold box was an Egyptian coffin, and the eyes were staring right at us! I made myself look at Pearl instead of the mummy eyes, or my mouth would have been hanging open, too.

“What did you get out of the elevator, for?” I asked.

“You said not to open my eyes.”

“Nobody takes off running with their eyes closed, Pearl.”

“But I thought you grabbed my hand.” She was still whispering. “To run away from the basement. But when I looked, it wasn’t you!”

“Well, who was it?”



“The boogeyman!” she blurted out, then.

“Emily Pearl Baker!”

“It was!”

“There’s no such thing as a boogeyman.”

“There is! He grabbed my hand--and we ran—and I opened my eyes— and screamed. Then he screamed. He had great big scary teeth! And a hat on!”

“Where did he go, then?”

“I must have scared him, I guess.”

“Some boogeyman.”

“He’s in there.” She pointed to the mummy case—or coffin—or whatever they’re called. “Watch out,” she whispered even quieter. “He might jump out at us!”

I looked over at the mummy case, and it was open just a little.

“Oh, holy cow...” I tried not to sound as scared as I felt. “I think we better get —” All of a sudden, a big black hairy hand came out.

If Pearl hadn’t screamed in my ear I probably wouldn’t have taken off so fast. Like the starting bell to the hundred meter. I grabbed her sleeve and ran down the hallway. No thinking involved, not even a little. We heard a loud, “Oooo, oooooo, ahhheeeee!” right behind us, and it scared the bejitters out of me.

We ran down one deserted hallway after another. Gosh, didn’t anybody human work down here? Where were all the security guards when you needed them? I was ready to call Dad, and was reaching seriously for my phone. But Pearl beat me to it. Only she didn’t need a phone. She hollered, “Daddy! Daddy!” louder than a

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stereo turned up to number ten.

Then we hit a dead end.

There were two big double doors with those push-type bar openers on them—and believe me—I pushed. No matter what was on the other side, it couldn't be worse than the boogeyman, right?

Wrong.

*“Most of the fundamental ideas of science are essentially simple, and may, as a rule, be expressed in a language comprehensible to everyone.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## CASEY TUCKER AND THE TEMPLE OF GLOOM

Charging through those doors was like busting through a time machine. Only I didn't realize it until too late. All of a sudden we were smack in the middle of some kind of ancient temple--with gold statues all over, and a giant sunburst made out of more gold that was hung up between two torches. The doors slammed with a loud BANG! behind us, and for a minute we just stood there. Gawking.

Where the heck was the exit?

All right. Don't panic. There were lights on, so somebody had to be working down here. And this was not—I repeat—was not ancient Egypt. It was just some new exhibit they were working on, and—

All of a sudden we heard a voice.

A whispery sort of kid voice coming from behind a life-size statue with a dog's head and a man's body. It said, “Jee-um... Jee-um...”

“It’s a ghost!” Pearl grabbed my arm so tight it hurt, and shut her eyes, again.

“Awww, it can’t be a ghost,” I whispered. Why was I whispering? “It’s just... just somebody who works down here, that’s all.”

“The statue said it!”

“Pearl, for gosh sakes--you been watching too many movies.” Then I said out loud, “Excuse me—is somebody there? My sister and I are looking for the exit.”

All at once, a head popped out from behind the statue, with the coolest safari hat you ever saw. It was a boy about Pearl’s age, with a pointed nose and bright brown eyes. You might wonder how they could be brown and bright at the same time, but they were. He was dressed in shorts and a white t-shirt. He had a khaki vest on, too, with about a jillion pockets in it.

“Hey —” He walked up to us. “I bet you’re the Baker kids! Pete and Pearl.”

“How did you know?” I asked.

“My Aunt Bill told me. She runs part of the zoo. Primates. She said one of the new curators had some kids my age, and I was—hey—what are you guys doing down here, anyway? The basements are off limits.”

I said, “We’re sort of...”

“Lost,” Pearl finished. “What ‘s your name?”

“Casey Tucker. I’m twelve. I come here every summer.”

“Awww, you’re too little to be twelve. Pete’s twelve and look how big he is, already.”

“Pearl —” I nudged her with my elbow for being rude but it didn’t seem to bother Casey.

“I’m small, but I’m old,” he explained, “and I just turned twelve last week.”

“Oh,” Pearl replied, like it made perfect sense to her. “Pete’s been twelve since Christmas.”

“If the basements are off limits,” I asked, “What are you doing down here?”

“I’m looking for Jim. We were coming to meet you guys but he gave me the slip at the Coke machine. Only he’s not there, now. And if I don’t hurry and find him my Aunt Bill’s going to —”

“Is Jim your cousin?” Pearl wanted to know.

“Heck no, he’s a monkey,” Casey looked toward the doors we had just come busting through. “And I’m in big trouble if I don’t get him back by ten-thirty.”

I looked at my watch. “Hey, that’s only twenty minutes from now.”

“You mean, a real live monkey?” Pearl was full of questions, and she didn’t think twice about asking. “The kind that lives in the zoo?”

“He’s a chimpanzee. But he doesn’t live in the zoo —he’s too important. Want to help me find him?”

“Sure,” I said.

“What’s so important about him?” Pearl asked.

“He talks,” Casey replied like talking monkeys were something you run into every day. “And he works for NASA sometimes. It’s not like him to disappear. He must have seen something he really liked. Come on.”

We followed him for a minute until Pearl yelled,

“Don’t open those doors! The boogeyman’s out there!”

“Nevermind,” I whispered. I was a little embarrassed that we had run away from a boogeyman now that someone else was there.

“The boogeyman? It was probably Jim.” Casey pushed through the doors and we followed right behind him. “Jee-um...” he called down the hallway. “Jee-um!”

“Come to think of it,” I said, “that hand did sort of look like a monkey hand. And those footprints, too.”

“What footprints?” Casey asked.

“I found some footprints by the Coke machine when I was looking for Pearl. Toes and everything.”

“Must have been Jim, all right.”

“He grabbed my hand!” Pearl’s voice was still shaky. “And ran halfway down the hall with me before I opened my eyes.”

“You were running with your eyes closed?” Casey looked surprised.

“Nevermind.” Pearl sighed like it was too hard to explain.

“He likes girls,” Casey told us. “What happened next?”

“I screamed, then he screamed, then he hid in the box.”

“You scared him,” he pronounced. “Better show me the box, he’s probably still in there.”

“Uh, it’s not really a box,” I warned him. “It’s a mummy case.”

“Uh-oh,” he worried. “If he breaks something I’ll really be in trouble. Better show me which one.”

When we came to the mummy case I let Casey open it. I don't think he knew anything about curses because he didn't think twice about looking inside.

"Hey —" his voice echoed with his head stuck in there. "This isn't a mummy case, it's a door... and there's some kind of a creepy looking —"

"Holy macaroni —" Pearl shouted, "There he is!"

We both looked down the hallway where she pointed. It was a monkey all right, only he had clothes on. It was the same kind of outfit Casey had. Shorts, vest, and even a hat. He was holding something that looked familiar and he had a big smile on his face.

"Our lunch sack!" whispered Pearl.

"Jim—shame on you," Casey said. "Give it back to Pearl."

The monkey shuffled up—sort of shy like—making soft little "Ooo-ooo-ooo," sounds, and handed Pearl the sack.

It was empty.

He made some funny signals to Casey with his hands, and then looked over at Pearl. I always thought of chimpanzees as being small, but he was bigger than she was.

"He says the food fell out," Casey explained.

"I bet he ate it," said Pearl. "He's got peanut butter on his mouth."

"He probably did, he loves to eat. But maybe my Aunt Bill will give us some hot dog money to make up for it."

"I don't mind if he ate it," she said, sort of dreamy

like. Uh-oh. I could tell right then she was fascinated with him.

“We better get him back now.” Casey took the monkey’s hand and started toward the Coke machine. “He’s got a training session at eleven, with a graduate student from some university.”

“Wow...” Pearl murmured. She still hadn’t taken her eyes off him. When he reached back for her hand to pull her along with them, she looked at me with that dreamy look and said, “Wow, he likes me.”

I brought up the rear.

I figured we were headed for the freight elevator again when Casey took a hard right, opened a storage closet and stepped inside. Jim went in after him and Pearl followed right along. Sheesh.

When I peeked in, they were all disappearing behind a row of shelves with cleaning stuff on it. Uh-oh. Another elevator. Only it wasn’t. When the door slid open there was a long empty hallway on the other side, with a golf cart parked next to the door.

“Hop in,” said Casey. “This is the fastest way to get from one building to the other around here. Only you have to work here to use one.”

Now it was my turn to be amazed. Before I realized I blurted out, “Wow—they let you drive it? Anytime you want?”

“Sure. If you know the head maintenance guy. Which I do.” Then he reminded me, “I come here every summer.”

“Oh, yeah,” I murmured.



*Cousin Summers*

I looked over the rig, trying to think of a way to ask if I could give it a try sometime, when Jim scampered up behind the wheel. “Hey,” I said, when Casey slid in after him on the passenger side. “Don’t tell me he’s going to drive.”

“He’d be awful disappointed if we don’t let him,” he explained. “He likes driving even more than drinking a soda.”

“He drinks soda?” Pearl was amazed.

“He drives?” So was I.

“Don’t worry, he’s real careful,” Casey said, as we climbed into the seat behind them. “Go, Jim Dandy.”

*“A person who never made a mistake never  
tried anything new.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE WILD RIDE

I think that monkey could have got a side job driving a taxi. He was terrific. He had to hold his chin up to see out, which made it look like he was really taking the job serious. That is, before he started showing off for Pearl. And that's what it was, too. Showing off.

At first he just looked back to make sure she was watching. The cart swerved a little but he corrected it right away. No big deal. The next thing he did was give it all the gas at once. I mean, he really punched it. That little cart practically did a wheelie it jumped ahead so fast.

Pearl squealed like somebody pinched her. I grabbed hold of the seat, and Casey hollered, “Whoa!” like he was trying to stop a bucking bronco instead of a golf cart. Not that we were going that fast. The thing probably only did twenty at the max. But picture yourself doing twenty miles an hour through your living room. I mean we're talking bumper cars.

The next time he looked back to see if Pearl was watching, he had a big grin on his face. The cart swerved, again. But this time it was going so fast he barely had time to notice, much less do anything about it.

“Watch the road!” screamed Pearl.

“Look out!” hollered Casey.

But it was too late. We scraped the wall on the left, Jim over corrected and we bumped into the one on the right. Then the right front tire went up and over a box of something that spilled out and went rolling all over the floor.

Cans of soda.

BOOM! We hit one, and it was like a bomb went off. Root beer fizzling out everywhere (I could tell by the smell). BOOM! There went another and BOOM! BOOM! We hit two at once and the back end of the cart felt like it was crashing through a waterfall.

About that time a fat guy came out of a closet with a case of lemon-lime. I guess he was refilling machines. He took one look at us coming straight at him and dropped it.

“Hey—you kids!” he yelled and jumped out of the way.

Jim swerved around him but he had to crash through the open door to do it, and we piled up in the supply closet. Thank heavens it was only a golf cart or we would have all been killed. By the look on that guy’s face, we were about to be.

“Casey Tucker,” he roared, “if I’ve told you once,

I've told you a hundred times not to let that banana eater drive my rigs!"

Jim covered his eyes—like no one could see him if he did that—and Casey grabbed hold of the canopy and swung himself out over the pile of cleaning supplies that had practically buried the front of the cart. Pearl and I just sat there.

"Gosh, Mr. Purdy, he didn't mean to. He was just showing off."

"I'll tell you who was showing off," Mr. Purdy growled.

"We'll clean up the mess," Casey offered quickly. "Every bit of it!"

"You bet you will, boy. That and a whole lot more. It's going to take more than clean up to pay for all those soda pops. And look at that—hinge is busted right off the door!"

"I'll pay for it, Mr. Purdy."

"You can say that, again." Then he looked over at Pearl and me. "You must be the Baker kids."

"Yes, sir." I hoped he wasn't going to march us back to Dad's office. Man. Gone less than an hour and we were in trouble already. "Pearl and I will be glad to help, too," I added.

"I can't help anybody!" wailed Pearl. "My clothes are wet!"

I nudged her with my foot and hoped Mr. Purdy wouldn't think she wasn't sorry. Then whispered, "They'll dry before you know it."

"I'll take Jim back to your Aunt Bill, so you can get

started,” Mr. Purdy said. “You’ll find some buckets and mops in that mess somewhere. I want everything washed down with hot soapy water.”

Pearl took one look at the long corridor we just came down, and groaned. She opened her mouth to complain but I nudged her, again, and she closed it.

“Come on, Jim Dandy,” Mr. Purdy said in a nicer voice as he held out his hand to the monkey.

Jim climbed right out of the cart and went off with him. He must have been worried about getting in trouble, too, because every time Mr. Purdy looked down at him, he covered his eyes again with his free hand. And he didn’t look back at Pearl at all. Not even once.

That’s how it turned out that the only thing we saw of the Jefferson City Museum that day, was the basement. And one of the maintenance yards. It took us a couple hours to clean up the mess. Then it took a couple more to mop up. That’s because there was just as much soda all over the walls as there was on the floor.

About the time we thought we would never get done, Mr. Purdy came back with a box full of hot dogs, potato chips, and two cartons each of chocolate milk. Even Pearl drank two. He fixed the hinge on the door while we finished up, and then we all got in the golf cart and headed for the maintenance yard.

Mr. Purdy drove.

We came up out of the tunnel onto a little black top road that skirted the park and wound around some

buildings behind the zoo. Then we turned into a big yard with wire fencing around it. Off to the right was a mini parking lot with seven more golf carts parked in it. We pulled into one of the empty spaces and got out.

Just when I figured we were free to go, Mr. Purdy said we would find buckets, rags, and detergent on a shelf in the maintenance shack. We had to wash and wax all those golf carts... and even two more that came in later.

Sheesh.

We had to work fast just to be done in time to meet Dad at five-thirty. At the same time, it wasn't as bad as you might think. Casey had a way of making everything seem like an adventure, and he was always making us laugh. Even Pearl had fun.

By the end of the day, it felt like we had known him for years. It was a sunny day and along about three o'clock, it got boiling hot in that maintenance yard. So, we squirted each other with the hose and sat in the shade of the shack for awhile.

I don't know why they called it a shack. It was a big aluminum shed with everything stored all nice and neat inside. Tools, mostly. And a couple of the kind of lawn mowers you ride on.

We made plans to meet at nine o'clock the next day at the zoo entrance, since Pearl still had her heart set on going there. Casey promised to give us the "tour to beat all tours," on account of he knew the coolest places to go and the best things to see (because he came here every summer). He even promised to show us some

things most people didn't even know about.

"Like what, for instance?" I asked.

"Like the inside of a gorilla house," he answered.

"You mean a cage?" Pearl wanted to know.

"No, I mean his house. Where he sleeps. It's a secret one-way window in the staff area that looks right into it. So you can peek in without him knowing. Scientists use it to observe his behavior. Regular tourists aren't allowed."

"Wow," breathed Pearl.

"Aren't we liable to get in trouble if we go there?" I could just see us spending the day cleaning up gorilla pens.

"Not if you know the head zoologist," he said. "Which I do."

"That's what you said about the head maintenance man," I reminded him.

"Mr. Purdy's a nice enough guy, he just yells a lot," Casey said.

"What's the head zoologist do?" asked Pearl.

"Tells stories," he replied. "And some of them are real whoppers. Like the one about Dr. Finklestein."

"You mean, Frankenstein," she corrected him.

"No, I mean Finklestein. He used to work here at the museum about twenty years ago. He was on the verge of making one of the biggest discoveries of all time when he disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Now, this was getting interesting.

"Yep. Most people think he had a heart attack when he was working in his lab, and just died there. He was

getting pretty old.”

“Don’t they know?” I asked. “I mean, that’s what they have autopsies for, isn’t it? To see what people died from?”

“They never found him. See, nobody knew where his lab was. He was working on such top-secret stuff he wouldn’t tell anybody. It’s somewhere on the museum grounds, though. That much is for sure.”

“How do they know he’s even dead, then?” I asked him.

Casey looked over at Pearl, who was scraping mud off her shoe with a stick while she was listening. “I don’t like to say in front of girls,” he said. “It’s sort of scary.”

“Awww, nothing scares me,” bragged Pearl--like she never ran away from a boogeyman before.

“Well,” Casey pushed his hat back and rubbed at a bit of water that was trickling down from his wet hair. “He disappeared about ten years ago, and he’s been seen a few times since then. Mostly around the space building, and almost always wearing his lab coat.”

For a minute it was quiet while we all thought about that. I don’t think Pearl got it. But it sure dawned on me all of a sudden.

“You mean, he’s a—” I looked over at Pearl because I suddenly didn’t want to say it out loud, either.

“Yep.” Casey knew I had guessed it. “He sure is.”

“Sure is, what?” asked Pearl.

“Rumors,” I said. “Just a lot of old rumors.”

“That’s why I made it my quest,” Casey said, “to



solve the mystery. That's how I 'm going to get famous."

Famous—I couldn't believe my ears. I had always wanted to be famous. I mean, wasn't that the reason I decided to produce *Dinosaur Planet* and win the Young Scientist Contest? I have wanted to be famous my whole life. Maybe even get known as the youngest boy scientist in history. Now, here was somebody who wanted to get famous about as much as I did.

I've always been pretty much of a loner (except for Pearl) and didn't think there was anybody like me in the whole world. But here was Casey Tucker, wanting to get famous for finding Dr. Finkelstein. Or, at least find out what happened to him. All of a sudden my worries of having to deal with a totally normal summer, vanished.

"Are you kidding?" I gasped. "How do you figure to do it?"

"By finding the lab," he explained simply. "Want to help?"

*“The monotony and solitude of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## RUMORS

That night as I lay in the hammock in my attic bedroom—couldn't get my bed up the crooked stairway, so I went with a hammock (way cooler, in my opinion)—I looked up at the stars through the row of windows across the slanted ceiling. I couldn't help thinking about “the quest” to find Dr. Finkelstein.

At the moment it seemed a lot more interesting than trying to fake an archaeological dig by filming dinosaur exhibits at an old museum. Not that I was giving up on my documentary show. But I was seriously thinking of putting it off for a while in favor of a real-life adventure. There were a lot of other ways to get famous. And I had a feeling this might be a good one. Of course, I would have to share the glory, considering it wasn't my idea.

But that didn't seem so bad. Lots of people had got famous by working together. Truth is, I never had a friend who wanted to be famous like I did. Heck—to be perfectly honest--I never actually had a close friend, at

all. During the summers we were always away on digs. And during the school year I was... well, school was just school. I had friends there, but we did school things.

Living out at the university all those years before we moved here, there weren't a lot of kids my age hanging around. This was an opportunity for adventure. And in the face of a real life adventure, even the dream of being the youngest boy scientist seemed dull. If this thing turned out right, we could both end up famous. Man, I could just see the headlines...

*"Youngest research team in history discover bones of missing scientist along with top-secret data."*

That would be some kind of famous, all right. Solving a legendary mystery! Why, if we could actually find Dr. Finkelstein's lab—along with all of his secrets—we might even go down in history!

Sort of like Stanley and Livingston. Dr. Livingston was the famous guy that was lost, and a reporter named Stanley found him. Now, whenever you see their names in history books, they just sort of go together. Stanley and Livingston. Like ham and cheese. Or peanut butter and jelly.

I could hardly wait to get started.

As it turned out, Casey had been looking for Dr. Finkelstein's lab ever since last summer. That's when he first found out about it. We planned to have our first "briefing" on everything he knew about it so far, after

we took Pearl to the zoo.

Usually I like zoos. But with something so important to do afterward, this one seemed too big and too boring. Even though it was probably the best one I'd ever been to. The gorilla house turned out to be a bust, too, on account of there were no gorillas in there when we peeked inside. Pearl wanted to stay and wait till one came. To get her talked out of that, I had to promise to buy her something at the souvenir store.

I practically spent my whole year's savings in that store. Pearl picked out a safari hat. Not the soft, cowboy looking kind Casey had that looked like it came from Australia--but the hard, round, jungle kind you see people wearing in Tarzan movies. It had a pink scarf tied around it too, and Pearl fell in love with it instantly.

Not that it cost me that much. But on a shelf right next to it I saw a bunch of those vests like Casey and Jim Dandy had. The one with a jillion pockets. Man, I just had to have one of those things. Like I wouldn't have been a part of the team if I didn't. I hardly had enough money after that to buy a pack of gum. So, I bought one: green watermelon flavor.

After our tour of the zoo, we went straight to the space building. Casey wanted to show us something called the "Lunar Cycle Exhibit." It was just a bunch of pictures on one of the walls, done up like a fancy bulletin board. I started reading the long paragraph under the words "Cycles of the Moon," when Casey jabbed me with his elbow.

"Not that." He pointed to a photo a little farther

over. “The picture. That’s Finkelstein.” Dr. Finkelstein had brown hair parted down the middle (like in the olden days) and a big bushy mustache that made me wonder how he could eat without getting food all over it.

“His eyes look weird,” observed Pearl as she stared up from beneath the brim of her new safari hat.

“That’s because he’s looking for someone,” Casey whispered so the old couple that stepped up behind us to read the display couldn’t hear.

We moved ahead to the life size model of the moon landing.

“Who’s he looking for?” Pearl wanted to know.

“Somebody to solve his mystery so he can rest in peace,” said Casey.

“Rest in peace!” she exclaimed. “That’s what they say in ghost stories!”

“It’s just a rumor, Pearl,” I nudged Casey with my shoe.

“Sorry,” he answered. “I guess I got a little carried away.”

If you stood close enough to the moon exhibit, you could almost imagine you were actually on the moon. Gray rocks and craters spread out toward a black, starry sky, and there was a life-size model of an astronaut that was so close you could see all the hoses and gadgets on his space suit. There was even a replica of the famous American flag they put up there, with its edges all stuck out straight like there was no gravity or air.

About the time I was thinking how cool it would be

to go to the moon, Casey dragged me over to look at the lunar buggy a few feet away. It was a little exploration vehicle with balloon-like tires, that wasn't much bigger than a golf cart. It had a lot more buttons and dials, though. A person would probably have to have a degree from NASA to drive one of those things. Not to mention a driver's license.

"He worked on that for the space program," Casey explained. "And this is where he's been seen the most, too. Usually with his lab coat on and a little box of tools, making some sort of adjustment on the lunar buggy."

"Have you ever seen him?" I asked the question as if seeing ghosts was an every day thing.

"Nope. I even camped out here for two nights last summer because I thought there would a better chance of seeing him after midnight. No such thing. It was quiet as a tomb in here."

"Weren't you scared?" I thought this kid must have nerves of steel to be brave enough to do something like that.

"Naw. My Aunt Bill was with me. She's camped out in all kinds of scary places and she's not afraid of anything."

Just when I was thinking I had to meet this Aunt Bill person, an alarm suddenly went off. Rrrring! Bells all over the place. I mean worse than at the carnival before the rides start to move. The old couple that was behind us again nearly jumped out of their skin, and everybody started looking around in a panic, like there

was a fire or something. I knew it was Pearl.

I looked back just in time to see her try to skidaddle back under the rail from inside that moon exhibit. I would have hollered at her but she was scared stiff already, so, I just grabbed her by the belt loops and pulled her out of there.

When I turned around, one of the security guards was heading for us with a key in his hand.

“Uh-oh,” Casey warned, “it’s the grouch.”

“Oh, boy.” I wondered what kind of jobs there were to do in the space building. Maybe dusting off old airplane parts or sweeping floors.

“Casey Tucker, I might have known!” He stepped over the rail himself and opened a little gray box on the wall. In a few seconds the alarm turned off. “Nothing to worry about, folks,” he announced to the crowd as he grabbed Casey by one ear and me by the other. “Just a couple of little zips in the wire, here.”

He didn’t have to grab Pearl. She was hanging onto me like a crab as he scuttled us all out into the hall.

“It was an accident, Mr. Stevens!” Casey tried to explain as he walked on tiptoes to keep his ear from coming off.

I would have laughed at how silly he looked only I had to do the same thing. Which wasn’t easy considering I had Pearl’s extra weight dragging me behind.

Sheesh.

We stopped by a closet and he parked us against the wall while he took out another key.

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

“Are we going to jail?” Pearl wailed. She thought everyone who wore a uniform was a policeman.

“Only if it happens, again,” answered Mr. Stevens seriously. He opened the closet and took out some things. “Brasso,” he said, giving us each a rag and handing a small can to Casey. “Aviation Room.” Then he pointed to two wide doors at the end of the hall.

We headed off that way.

“Here we go,” Casey moaned when we were out of earshot. “If we don’t have it done in an hour, he’ll make us do the observatory, too.”

“Have what done?” I asked as I rubbed at my ear. It felt two inches bigger than my other one.

We came to the door and he stopped to point. “Those.”

It was a huge airplane hangar with replicas of every plane in history: from the one the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, to the latest stealth fighter. Some were hanging off the ceiling but most were on the ground with little rope fences around so nobody could climb up on them or touch anything. The ropes were strung through short metal posts that were bolted to the floor, and each one had a brass ball on top. There had to be at least a hundred of them.

“Holy smokes!” Now, I was moaning. “We got to shine a hundred brass balls?”

“There’s ninety three,” Casey answered. “I know because I had to do this job six times last summer.”

“You walked in the moon exhibit six times?” Pearl was impressed.



“No. It’s just the only thing Mr. Stevens hands out for getting caught off limits.”

“How you supposed to know what’s off limits?” she looked indignant.

“Anything behind a rope or a rail,” I said in my sternest big brother tone. “And you better work so fast you make smoke—Emily Pearl Baker—or you’ll be doing them all by yourself!”

“It wasn’t my fault, Petie!” she whined. “That old lady was walking so close behind me, she gave me a flat tire! Then, when I bent down to fix it, my hat fell off and rolled right under the loon buggy! After that, I —”

“All right, all right —” I hoped Casey hadn’t picked up on her calling me, Petie. The last time she did that on one of our dinosaur digs, I got tagged with it for the whole summer. Everybody on the team got into it.

We got all the balls shined with seven minutes to spare.

It would have been sooner if Pearl hadn’t kicked over the can of Brasso at the last minute and we had to clean that up, too. But I couldn’t complain. Every time I looked over at her, she would scrub a little faster and say, “Smokin’... see?”

It was lunchtime after that and we headed for some place Casey called the Bird Loft. At first I thought it was going to be some sort of fast food place back at the zoo, and I was about to remind him that I was flat broke since I spent all my money at the souvenir store this morning. But this was a summer of surprises.

The Bird Loft turned out to be one of the best things we had come across, yet, and you wouldn't believe where it was. It was just what he called it, too. A bird loft. But to get there we had to catch one of the tour boats through "Gator Country."

They were open boats with benches across that held about twelve people. They meandered in and out of a little winding river made to look like the Everglades. We showed our passes and got on for free but we still had to wait in line like the rest of the tourists to get a place on one of the boats.

The three of us got a bench to ourselves. The driver stood at the back to steer and he was dressed in sort of a costume: jeans and red shirt, with a leather vest and alligator boots. He had a red bandana tied around his neck and the coolest leather hat with a band that looked like real rattlesnake skin.

"Going home, Case?" he asked as we sat down, "Or taking the tour."

"Home, Tom. I'm going to show Pete and Pearl the bird loft. They're new here. Their dad works in the natural history building. Dinosaurs."

"So I heard. Hi, kids, welcome aboard." He revved the engine and we could feel the boat start to move. "Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Gator Country," he spoke into a microphone as we headed out into the river.

"Please remain seated while the boat is in motion, and remember to keep your hands and arms out of the water. The gators you will be seeing on this trip are all

real... and they get hungry this time of day.”

“That’s not a joke,” Casey whispered. “There’s an old gator lives here, and he must be twenty feet long. He’s a mean thing, too. Old One Eye, they call him. That’s on account of he bit the foot off one of the feeders and the guy had to pop him with a stick.”

“He poked his eye out?” Pearl was shocked.

“Had to,” Casey replied. “Or he’d been ate up for sure. As it was, the guy lost practically all of his—ouch!”

“It’s just a rumor, Pearl,” I said.

Casey rubbed his side where I jabbed him with my elbow. “Probably is,” he muttered. “Happened years ago. Old One Eye’s so old now, he probably doesn’t have many teeth left, anyway.”

Man. You could tell he didn’t have any brothers or sisters to look out after. Didn’t he know stories like that could give kids nightmares? We rounded a bend in the river, and some tall trees with moss hanging down gave way to a little clearing.

In the middle of it was an old fashioned settler’s cabin with a chicken coop and a barn, and some big iron pots in the yard for melting down sugar cane like they did in the old days. There was a rickety wooden dock in front with an old rowboat tied up to it, too.

The driver pulled up along side the dock and Casey said, “Come on,” as he got up and jumped out.

“We’re getting out?” Pearl worried. “What about the gators?”

“Swamp folks, ladies and gentlemen,” said the

driver as he backed the boat away and left us on the dock. “Let’s hope they stick to the trails because it’s a hot day... and gators get restless on hot days.”

“Don’t worry,” Casey said as he started up the trail ahead of us, “that’s just part of his show. This little island is really one of the study and observation centers for university students. Only its not used much in the summer.”

“But what about the gators?” Pearl asked again. She was trudging along the trail between us, on account of there was no way she was going to be the last one in line if there were gators running loose.

“Awww, they stick to the water mostly,” Casey assured. “Every once in awhile you’ll see one taking a nap on the bank: then you just give them a lot of space.”

Walking along that trail through the swamp with Pearl up ahead wearing a safari hat, I could almost imagine we were on a real expedition. Little did I know that—before this summer was over—we would be walking in places where there were a lot worse things than alligators roaming around.

The Finkelstein Expedition was about to begin.

*“Joy in looking and comprehending is nature's  
most beautiful gift.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE BIRD LOFT

The bird loft turned out to be a giant tree-house in the middle of the compound, where students could look down and observe animal behavior. Birds mostly--on account of it was way up in the trees. They could observe whatever happened to be penned up in the fenced area underneath, too. Right now, there was nothing.

We climbed a long ladder to get up to it, and entered through a trap door in a narrow little deck with rails that went all the way around. There were binoculars hanging from posts every ten feet or so, and the first thing Pearl did was grab a pair and try to find something to watch.

“See that big fat tree over there sticking out of the water?” Casey pointed her in the right direction. “Watch that for awhile and you’ll see something. It’s a nesting place for a big flock of snowy egrets.”

“What’s a snowy egret?” asked Pearl.

“A huge white bird with long legs, a long neck, and a long beak.”

“How big?” She squinted through the lenses.

“About as big as you,” he replied.

“Wow!” she whispered.

That would keep her busy for awhile. Pearl was fascinated with anything alive. We practically had to drag her away from the zoo this morning, or she would have taken up residence there.

Inside the tree-house didn't feel much different than standing out on the deck. The wooden walls were only solid halfway up, and the rest was screens. You could still see the tree branches all the way around and feel the outside air. It was great.

There was a wooden table and a couple of chairs on one side of the room, and two cots with sleeping bags on the other. There was a solid wooden box built around the tree trunk that came right up through the center of the floor, and there was a roof all the way around to keep out any rain. Above each screen there were rolls of canvas that could be let down and tied off so you could sort of close the whole thing up if it got cold.

“You and your Aunt Bill actually live up here?” I noticed one cot was made up nice and the other was a mess.

“No. This is just where Jim and I sleep. Aunt Bill stays down in the staff bungalow over there.” He pointed. “With two other zoologists that work here in the summer. Aunt Bill does primate research during the rest of the year. Travels to Africa, South America... all over the place. She even went to China once. This is a

kind of home base for her.”

He took a key out of his pocket and opened a padlock on a little refrigerator.

“You have electricity up here, too?” I couldn't believe how cool everything was.

“No. It runs off batteries. We have to keep it locked though, or Jim would eat everything at once. Want some apple juice and a sandwich?”

“Sure.” Before I went over to help him make sandwiches I looked outside to check on Pearl. She was still looking through the binoculars.

“Maybe you could stay over some night,” Casey set out six slices of bread while I opened the mayonnaise. “Then we could really get serious about looking for Finkelstein. See my map I tacked up on the wall over there? I've marked off every place I looked already. Want mustard?”

“I do but Pearl doesn't.” I walked over to the map and stared. It was all hand drawn, showing the basements and tunnel system of the whole Jefferson City Museum. There were “X's” marked off in about eight different places. “This,” I said as I admired the artwork, “is totally cool.”

“Thanks. I'm sort of into maps. And I love to explore.” He piled over a ton of ham on each sandwich while he talked. “I've thoroughly covered the space building. Spent most of last summer there since it seemed like the obvious place. That being his field and all.”

“But that's just it, Case! Wouldn't the whole point

be to have the lab in some place that wasn't obvious?"

"Sure, but he would need to have access to things wouldn't he? Like the big telescope in the observatory and the computers and stuff."

"Not necessarily. I mean if he needed it he could just go there, right? And computers—heck, you can set them up anywhere."

"I guess you're right. But I sure can't picture him setting up a lab in the art building or here in the zoo somewhere. Hey—he was seen once at the aquarium though. In a crowd passing by the main tank. And once near the primates, too! It might be somewhere in the zoo. Off one of the animal habitats maybe, where most people never go."

"Maybe. But you know where I'd hide it, if I was him?"

"Where? Want a pickle?"

"Sure."

"I got some chips, too."

"In the natural history basement. It's the only one with three levels and it's mostly storage. Some of those crates haven't been opened for a hundred years."

"I'll say. Those rooms in the bottom level are packed so full you can't even get in to them anymore. Shoot—they've been working on that temple exhibit for almost five years now. Way before I started coming here."

"That's what I mean! If I was going to hide something I'd hide it in the oldest, deepest, dustiest room down there."



“Hmmm...” Casey licked mustard off the butter knife and set it aside. He had sort of a far away look in his eyes and I could tell he was thinking.

“Pearl!” I hollered at her through the nearest screen. “Come and eat.”

“I’m watching a bird comb its feathers.” She didn’t budge.

“We could start by exploring that stairway,” Casey suggested as if he was talking more to himself than to me. “We never would have found it if Jim hadn’t tried to hide in there yesterday.”

“What stairway?”

“The one in the mummy case”

“You mean there was a stairway in there? Oh, holy cow!” I didn’t mind looking for laboratories but the thought of messing around with mummy cases that might have ancient curses on them gave me the creeps.

“We were already on the bottom level and it went down even further. Yep. I think we should start there.”

“What about the people who work down there? Won’t we get in trouble again for being off limits?”

“Nobody even goes down there except for a couple hours in the afternoons. The museum has so much Egyptian stuff already it’s not a high priority project.”

“What about the maintenance guys?” I reminded him.

“They only work nine to five. We’ll just have to go there after hours, or when we’re absolutely sure they’re busy someplace else. Mr. Purdy has a way of showing up all of a sudden, where you least expect him. Maybe

we could do it on a night when you stay over, so you don't have to meet your dad or anything.”

The thought of wandering around in a haunted basement after dark, when no one else was there, made my throat so dry I could barely swallow. Me and my big mouth.

“What do you think about this weekend?” Casey asked.

I was still thinking of Egyptian curses.

“You think your dad will let you?”

“Oh. Sure, that wouldn't be a problem.” I wasn't about to let on how spooked I was. Casey Tucker was six months younger than me, and a lot smaller. And he didn't seem to get spooked about anything.

I mean, he lived in a tree above an alligator swamp and roomed with a real live monkey. He was actually doing things most kids just pretend about. I guess you could even go so far as to say if there was such a thing as a young “*Indiana Jones*” this kid was it. All of a sudden, a gate clanged down below, and the loudest screeching and carrying on you ever heard started up. We went outside to the deck so we could look down...

“Jim's home,” Casey said around a bite of his sandwich. “He always gets excited when he comes home for the day.”

Excited wasn't the word for it. He was like a wild black ball streaking from one end the yard to the other. He jumped onto a tire swing for three seconds, then leapt off it and scampered up the tree like lightning without even using the ladder.

“Where’s his clothes?” Pearl wanted to know.

“He doesn’t wear them in the compound here,” Casey replied. “Aunt Bill says he needs time every day just to be a monkey. Here’s my Aunt Bill.”

She wasn’t what I expected. I mean, how would you picture a scientist lady with a name like Bill—who wasn’t afraid of anything? I thought she was going to be at least six feet tall, with a man’s haircut and a face that could scare a gorilla. Right?

Wrong.

Aunt Bill was small, like Casey, with long blonde hair tied back with a scarf and the prettiest blue eyes you ever saw. She had a tan like she lived on the beach. She was wearing shorts and a khaki shirt with a patch on the shoulder that said “*Jefferson City Zoo*” on it. She had a backpack, too. Not with buckles or pockets--just a simple canvas type with an open top that people usually carry books in. Only whatever she had in there was sort of round. And wiggly.

“Hi guys.” She smiled as she came up through the trap door, “I thought I might find you here.”

“We’re planning our first expedition,” Casey said. “This is Peter and Pearl.”

“I figured they might be,” Her eyes looked all twinkly, like Casey’s, when she talked. She looked at Pearl and me. “I’m really glad you two are here. I’ve got a lot of projects going this summer and I wouldn’t have been able to help much.”

About that time Jim dropped out of one of the high branches of the tree, clattered over the roof above us

and then jumped down to run along the top of the rail to where Pearl was. He gave her a big grin, said a lot of “ooo, ooo, ooo’s,” and then raced inside to jump onto his cot and start bouncing on it. No wonder his was a mess.

Aunt Bill opened the refrigerator and took out an apple. That quieted him down. She tossed it over to him and he caught it one handed—just like it was a short fly in a ball game—and he settled down on his cot to munch on it.

“Well...” She sat down at the table and reached for a piece of ham to nibble on. “Where’s the next hunch?”

“It was Pete’s idea,” Casey said eagerly. “The natural history basement. You know all those storage rooms and everything nobody ever goes in? Jim Dandy found a hidden stairway in a mummy case yesterday, and we thought we would explore that first.”

“Sounds exciting.” She sounded like he was talking about competing in the next track meet instead of exploring haunted basements that were off limits. “Remember what I told you about the lower levels though. It’s sort of a maze down there. Not a good place to get lost.”

“Oh, we won’t get lost,” Casey assured. “We were there already, yesterday. We know just where it is. Right, Pete?”

“I guess so,” I answered. I was thinking maybe it wouldn’t be such a bad idea if she came with us, and was about to make a suggestion when Pearl interrupted.

“Can you do braids?” she asked all of a sudden.

“My mom’s gonna be gone all summer and Pete and Daddy don’t know how.”

“Sure I can,” said Aunt Bill. “Come on over here and I’ll fix you up.”

She took off Pearl’s safari hat and even I was embarrassed. We hadn’t had time to do anything with her hair last night because she was so tired from all that work yesterday. She fell asleep on the couch right after dinner. Now, it was so full of tangles it looked more like a pot scrubber than human hair.

“Uh-oh,” said Aunt Bill. “This looks pretty serious. Maybe you should come down to the bungalow with me where we can work on it with combs and brushes.”

“OK,” Pearl agreed.

“After that, you can help me feed Hannah. Casey said you like animals and she needs a lot of attention.”

“Who is she?” Pearl was already getting that funny light in her eyes, so I knew she was hooked.

“Hannah Barbara is a baby chimp who lost her mother a few weeks ago and needs constant care. She’s taking a nap in my backpack right now.”

Pearl’s mouth dropped open and she looked at the little round lump in the bottom of the backpack with total delight.

That’s how Casey and I got the rest of the afternoon to ourselves.

*“If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?”*

*Albert Einstein*

## IN SEARCH OF DR. FINKELSTEIN

Casey and I decided we might never get a chance like this again, so we went for it. After Pearl and Aunt Bill had gone, he looked at his watch and said, “We have fifteen minutes.”

“Before what?” I asked.

“Before Mr. Purdy gets off his lunch hour. If we hurry I think we can make it to the stairway without him seeing us. We won’t have to wait till the weekend.”

He reached under his cot and pulled out a backpack. The regular kind with buckles and pockets that were stuffed to bursting with things we might need. You could tell he had done this sort of thing before.

Like I say, it was a snap decision, so we didn’t do a whole lot of thinking things through before we took off. All we had on our minds was getting to the stairway and exploring the scary places without having to worry about Pearl. Jim Dandy was no problem, either. We left him swinging through the tree branches with a pair of binoculars around his neck. He didn’t even want to

come along. He was too busy doing monkey things.

I had my doubts about being able to get all the way to the natural history building in fifteen minutes. As it turned out, we didn't have to. Mr. Purdy ate lunch in the cafeteria of the science building every day, along with all the other maintenance guys. All we had to do was get past that building before he came out. Then--even if he had work to do in the natural history basement again, we would still be way ahead of him.

We didn't have to wait for the tour boat either. When we got to the dock there were three rowboats tied up to it that other people had used to get across. So, we just hopped in one and rowed back ourselves. We didn't see any gators.

Everything went off without a hitch. Since it was lunchtime, no one was working in the basement at all. We could hear some people talking in one of the staff lounges near the temple exhibit, but nobody was walking around and nobody saw us.

Except for the mummy eyes.

I wasn't thinking about much of anything but getting there, and after that, I wasn't thinking at all. We slipped inside the mummy case as quick as we could, and stood there in the dark for a minute. I heard Casey rummaging in his backpack and in a few seconds a flashlight clicked on. It cast long eerie shadows down the steep narrow stairway.

"Holy smokes—" I peeked over his shoulder, "look how far it goes down." Casey started off first and I followed.

“Count the steps,” he said, “and look for any unusual marks on the walls in case we have to identify it later on. There could be others down here that look just like it. We don’t want to waste time getting lost.”

I didn’t want to get lost, period. And I wasn’t about to leave the possibility open, either. So, I took the gum I was chewing out of my mouth and stuck it on the wall. Bright fluorescent green and it smelled like watermelon. I’d recognize it anywhere.

At stair number seventeen we took a hard left, went down six more steps to a little landing and then went left again. Exactly seventeen more stairs and we were at the end. By a wooden door. There was a little window at the top with an iron shutter on it for peeking through.

I would have been in favor of taking a peek before we went in, but we didn’t vote. Casey turned the knob and pushed, and we went right on through. There was a big room on the other side, stacked practically to the ceiling with crates and boxes. And, sure enough, they had a layer of dust so thick on them you could tell they hadn’t been moved in years.

Casey ran the flashlight beam over the one closest to us. It had black letters stamped on the side that said, “*Sutter Expedition 1923.*”

“Holy cow!” I whispered.

“Want to open it and look inside? I have a couple tools right here in my —”

“No way.” I was thinking of South American spiders. Even though if one happened to be inside it was probably dead by now. Especially if it had been in there



since 1923.

“We can close it back up again,” Casey reasoned. “I’ve looked at lots of stuff in the basements. Long as we don’t bust or take anything.”

“I think we should stick to what we came here for,” I told him. “If it doesn’t look like a lab, we pass it up. Otherwise, we’ll spend the whole summer looking in boxes.”

“You’re right,” he agreed. “Most of them are full of broken pots and old bones, anyway.”

“Old bones?”

“Sure. You ought to see the dinosaur collection. It’s one level up. Biggest warehouse in the place.”

“I’d like to see the dinosaur collection,” I admitted. “That’s my specialty. Prehistoric research.”

“I’ll take you tomorrow. Dinosaurs are really popular right now, so there’s always lots of people working in there. Mostly college kids and they’re pretty cool. Don’t mind you watching, at all.”

We went around the whole room. Back and forth. From one end to the other. There were no other doors, no windows, and nothing but boxes and crates piled up on top of each other. A total dead end. But we went all the way around again, just to make sure.

Nothing.

“How about that box over there? Casey pointed his beam about ten feet ahead of where we were standing.

“What about it? There’s a jillion of them. And they all say Sutter Expedition.”

“It’s the only one leaning up against a wall.”

“So?”

“So... maybe it’s like the mummy case. Maybe there’s another hidden stairway inside it.”

“Anything’s worth a try,” I agreed. “Let’s check it out.”

And that’s how it happened—while Casey was rummaging in his backpack for something to open it with—I reached out and gave it a pull. And the whole thing slipped away to the side.

“Look out!” I hollered, but it didn’t fall. Instead, it just moved about three feet and stopped. There was an inside to an elevator behind it. A fluorescent light came on.

“Oh, my gosh!” Now even Casey was whispering. “I think we found something, Pete! I really think we—” He stepped carefully inside. “Found something.”

He looked around for a minute and then pushed the only button on the panel. The light flickered, the floor started to rumble, and it felt like the whole thing was about to blow up.

“Quick—get out of there!” I pulled him back through the door before it closed. Instant dark.

“Turn on the flashlight,” I said.

“I can’t.” His voice sounded strange without a body. “I dropped it in there.”

“In the elevator?”

“Yep.

“Oh, holy cow—it will take us hours to find our way out of here without a light! I’ll have to call my dad. Then he’ll panic and send out a search party or

something. We'll end up doing slave labor for the rest of the summer!"

"I guess we better go back for it then. Do whatever you did the first time and maybe that other light will come on again."

So I reached out, felt for the box, and tried to push it open again. It moved just as easy as the first time, and in a few seconds the light came on. The backpack was in the middle of the floor where Casey dropped it and the flashlight had rolled off in the corner.

"Nothing happened," Casey observed as I stepped inside to pick it up. "Everything looks the same as it did the first time. We might as well push the button again and see where it goes."

"Are you kidding? Suppose we can't get the door open from this side and we get stuck in here?"

"It's just an ordinary wooden crate, we could bust it open with my tools."

"Bust it open—how would you like to spend the summer cataloging boxes from the Sutter Expedition? Which is probably what we would be doing if we busted something down here."

"It would be worth it if we found Finkelstein wouldn't it? Come on, Pete. This is the hottest lead I've ever had! We could be famous."

That was the word that got me. Famous. Even if we didn't find Finkelstein, the chances of getting some publicity over this little escapade were pretty good. I could just see the headlines...

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

*“...Kids trapped in elevator for three days,  
survive on granola bars...”*

“Oh, go ahead,” I said finally. “We might as well get it over with because we sure won’t be able to think of anything else until we do.”

You would think I said, “on your mark, get set, go!” the way he scrambled for that button. Only this time there were no flickering lights and no rumbles. Instead, the door slid closed like a spring trap, and there was a high-tech hum that sounded more like an airplane engine revving up than an old elevator.

After that, it was like one of those roller coaster rides that left your hair standing on end. I mean, all of a sudden it felt like the whole bottom dropped out and we were falling at light speed. Now I’m not going to pretend we were boy heroes or anything—because we weren’t.

Both of us were yelling our heads off.

*“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit  
a very persistent one.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## DOWN TO THE BONES

When the elevator stopped, we couldn't do anything but stand there for a few seconds, waiting for something else to happen. Which it did. The door slid open and it looked like we were in a cave or tunnel of some kind. There must have been a lighting system down there, because even though we couldn't actually see any lights, we could see the rocky walls and ceiling. The dirt floor looked almost as hard as cement.

We stuck our heads out.

Any other time we would have got out of that elevator as fast as we could. But there was something strange about down there. I can't say exactly what it was, but I knew what it wasn't...

It wasn't part of the Jefferson City Museum.

Neither one of us said or did anything right away. We just stood there with our heads sticking out. Looking around. We seemed to be at the end of a tunnel, and it either stopped about twenty yards down or

made a turn. It wasn't bright enough to tell.

I don't know what we would have done if nothing else happened. We probably would have stayed there, staring, until we froze into idiots and thawed out again. We were that surprised. About that time we heard a voice. It was a lady's voice coming out of the ceiling or something. But we didn't see anybody.

It said very business-like, "Good morning, Dr. Finkelstein. Your notes have been typed up and are ready for you in the shuttle lounge. Coffee and two creams will be served while you wait. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Casey and I looked at each other, and then to the end of the tunnel again, expecting some kind of secretary to come around the corner. Nobody did. After a few seconds of silence—waiting for an answer I guess—the voice said, "Have a nice flight."

Casey moved out into the tunnel first, almost like he was in a trance. I wasn't far behind. We might have been scared stiff, but we were definitely in Finkelstein's territory, and the pull was irresistible.

I have to say it's a lot more exciting to sit in a movie theatre and watch someone else walk into the unknown. Mostly because even if the guy dies he will probably be back in another adventure next year. Especially if he's famous. Knowing it isn't real makes anything that happens pretty easy to take. But I'll tell you right now—in real life—I got the bejitters just walking down that tunnel.

It was ten times worse than wandering through

basement hallways thinking the soda machine was an alien. Down here I thought there really might be one. Especially with voices coming out of the ceiling telling you to have a nice flight.

Flight to where?

Which is why I was totally shocked all over again when we turned the corner and saw the partially excavated bones of a pterodactyl sticking out of the wall. Practically complete, like he was trying to fly right out of that mass of solid rock, and froze there.

There were other scattered bones sticking out all around it, too, and farther along, a whole side-section of another pterodactyl, upside down. Traumatized. Like it had been caught in flowing lava or something.

“Casey...” I was awestruck. “We’re walking through an exposed fossil vein... the biggest I ever saw. You know what that is up there?”

“Some kind of flying dinosaur, I guess,” he whispered back. “Gosh—how would you like to have that thing come after you?”

“Pterodactyls are very rare,” I explained. “There’s only a few of them that have been found in fossil form. That’s on account of they were creatures of the air and didn’t come down very often. Except to trees or high mountaintops where they made their nests. Man, do you think Finkelstein was into dinosaurs? Because somebody has done a lot of work on this wall.”

“Not that I know of. Heck, if we hadn’t got here in an elevator and heard that voice, I’d think we died and went to —”

A door opened up along the side wall about ten feet ahead of us and a lot of strange lights and humming noises spilled out. We stopped like we were shot.

“It’s Finkelstein’s lab!” Casey said it in a tone that would have fit better if the words had been, “It’s Frankenstein’s Monster!”

“You think he’s still alive?”

“Naw. We must have activated everything by coming down. He’s probably in there though... his bones...”

I wasn’t so sure I was ready to see his bones. Not like this anyway. I could just picture it. The old guy slumped over a desk with wispy long hair sticking to his skull (they say your hair keeps growing for awhile after you die) and shreds of a lab coat all in tatters. His equipment casting eerie lights and shadows all around because--in this environment--it could probably sit for a hundred years and still turn on.

I wondered if there were any curses connected with busting into a lab somebody had died in.

“Let’s go.” Casey took a deep breath. And, as usual, he went first.

It wasn’t a lab. It looked like an airport waiting room or something. Chairs along the wall and a pile of books and magazines on low tables. The sliding door was aluminum and the walls were white. Not rock like the tunnel we just came through.

There were no bones anywhere. No anybody.

There was a very familiar smell though. One that didn’t fit in with all the strangeness. It was coming from



off in a corner where a hot fresh cup of coffee was sitting on a small counter with two tiny cartons of cream next to it. The kind they bring out in a little bowl when you go to a restaurant.

The coffee smelled fine, just like our kitchen when my dad brews his in the morning. But I wouldn't have wanted to pop open one of those creams. Sitting around for ten or twenty years, it was probably as rotten as bird droppings.

"Look at this!" Casey moved over to a big, elaborate chart on the wall. "It's a map of the solar system with... with little red lines going every which way."

"Hey..." I reached over his shoulder to touch a finger to a tiny blinking dot. "This looks just like one of those submarine tracking screens with electronic –"

Another voice came over a loud speaker somewhere. It was different from the first one, but a lady just the same. It said, "Your shuttle has arrived. Please board through gate B."

We looked around.

About that time another portion of the wall slid back, showing a little tram-looking thing with two seats in it, not much bigger than a golf cart. There was no top on it. Just a boat shaped body with two seats sticking up, sitting on a long shiny rail.

"What do you think?" Casey asked.

"Probably goes anywhere in the complex," I replied. "Maybe even to his lab."

Casey poked his head out, trying to see down the

tunnel. “Looks safe enough,” he pronounced. “Looks just like the rock tunnel we came through. Want to give it a try?”

“Might as well. It all seems to be set up pretty routine, like he did this every morning.

What with the coffee and everything. I guess it can’t be too far away.”

Casey slipped off his backpack and threw it in first. He opened a little door on the side and climbed in, and I climbed in after. The seats had high backs on them and were awfully padded for nothing but a shuttle run to the next set of rooms. It even had seat-belts.

We buckled up in case it turned out to be something like those high speed monorails in Japan that go over a hundred miles an hour. Then we just sat there looking around. Waiting. Like this was one of your every day rides at Disneyland or something.

“Want a piece of gum?” I reached into one of my vest pockets for the half empty pack.

Casey shook his head. He was too busy looking over the shuttle to be bothered. “I don’t see a single button or gauge.” He craned his neck to look behind us. “The whole thing is totally automatic.”

“Scientists are famous for not wanting to waste time on every day things. Did you know, when John Muir was a teenager, he invented a bed that would set him on his feet every morning, turn on the light, and open the next book he was reading?”

“Wow.”

“Finkelstein probably didn’t want to be bothered

driving the shuttle when he could sit here, read notes and drink coffee instead. Hey, look at this.” I flipped down a little tray on the panel in front of me. “Custom made coffee rest. I’ll bet he even –”

Putting down the tray must have been the signal for the thing to go. No sooner had it clicked into place, we lurched forward, and a little control panel rose up out of the dash with all kinds of dials and blinking lights.

“Uh-oh,” Casey muttered. “That looks just like the controls on the lunar buggy.”

“Journey to the Center of the Earth, maybe.” I joked and tried to sound reassuring. “But don’t worry. There’s no way we’re going to the moon. No way to get outside.”

The next words I heard were not Casey’s.

“Destination Alpha One,” said a man’s voice that came from a speaker beside my elbow. “Locking in coordinates. Please wait.”

We weren’t waiting. The shuttle was moving ahead along the rail at a pretty good clip and I figured the next thing we would hear was the voice warning us to “keep our hands and arms inside the vehicle.”

We came to a curve and took it without slowing down. Our shoulders bumped and squeezed together, and the pull of gravity was like some giant hand pushing us to the right.

“Still waiting,” said the voice.

We started down the long slope of a hill, gaining speed. The cool damp air of the tunnel made it seem like a wind was blowing through, and Casey had to hold

onto his hat so it wouldn't fly off.

“Confirmation from Alpha One complete. Commencing cabin pressurization procedure.”

There was a buzz of something electric behind us and all of a sudden a clear bubble-like shield came down over our heads. Just like the automatic top on a convertible.

“Oh, my gosh!” Casey was still holding onto his hat, even though we were totally closed in now. “Oh, my gosh!”

We both saw it at the same time. A big shaft of bright light ahead of us, and the track we were on shot straight up through the middle of it.

“Fifteen seconds to lift off,” said the voice.

“Lift off—holy smokes, Casey!” I hollered.

“Look for a manual override button!” he yelled. “We got to turn it off!”

“Where!” I tried pushing up the tray, again, but that didn't do it.

“The panel—the panel!”

“Ten seconds and counting. Nine... eight... seven...” the voice continued.

“It's got a protective shield over it!” I tried banging on it anyway. Nothing.

“Holler into the speaker! Help! Somebody!” He started without me but it wasn't voice activated.

“Three... two... one...” said the voice. “Engaging automatic thrust capacitors.”

We hit the bottom of the hill and the force of speed catapulted us up through the shaft like a rock flying out

*Cousin Summers*

of a slingshot. It was broad blinding daylight out there. If we would have looked down just then, we might have been able to see the whole Museum complex as we were flung up into the sky. We didn't even think about it.

We were too busy hollering our heads off again.

*“The fear of death is the most unjustified of all fears, for there's no risk of accident for someone who's dead.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE FLIGHT TO ALPHA ONE

At first it was like a dream. This couldn't be happening. But then how could two different people have the same dream at the same time?

If I survived this thing my dad was going to kill me. About the only rule I had (outside of doing a normal activity with Pearl every day) was that I was not—repeat—was not, under any circumstances, to leave the museum. Well, at least I hadn't brought Pearl along, so my parents would still have one child left after I died.

I was pretty sure we were going to die.

Because even if this thing actually managed to get us somewhere, how were we going to get back? We didn't know where the emergency button was, much less how to fly it.

We stopped hollering when it got dark all of a sudden and saw we were gliding through space. In orbit. We had been shot up into the air like some

satellite and were probably never going to come down again. All because we wanted to be famous.

Disappearing doesn't get you famous. Lots of people have disappeared—kids even—and nobody ever heard of them. You only get on the news if you're already famous before it happens. And it sure as heck doesn't get you in a history book. At the moment I didn't feel like it would be all that great getting myself into a history book anyway.

I fumbled in one of my pockets for the phone and flipped it open. The little screen lit up, and a blinking message said, "out of service area." No surprise there. But what good was having a cell phone for emergencies if it didn't work in an emergency?

"I guess we... we better check our resources," Casey sounded miserable as he reached for the backpack. "See how long we can survive."

"Who cares?" An awful feeling came over me, like I was maybe about to bawl, or something. "They're never going to look for us up here. Let's face it, Case. We're going to end up with our picture on a milk carton. Because that's about how far any search for us will get!" I sighed. "We didn't even leave a trail to follow."

"Jim Dandy can!" Casey suddenly sounded hopeful. "At least he could get someone as far as the tunnels. Then maybe they could bring in some experts to figure it all out. From NASA maybe. I have three granola bars and a bag of licorice. What have you got?"

"Half a pack of gum."

"At least it's something. I'll take that piece of gum

now. My mouth is so dry I don't even have spit."

"We hollered like a couple of loonies," I handed him a piece and unwrapped another one for myself.

"I won't tell if you won't. Hey, you already have some. We got to make it last even if the flavor runs out."

"It's gone." "Gone—gone where?"

"I don't know. I must have swallowed it during the lift off."

"Do you think we blacked out?"

"Heck, no. I can account for every second. Can't you?"

"Seems like I can. But then not much as been what it seems today."

"I'll say. If we're in orbit, what happened to all the G-forces you're supposed to feel breaking free of earth's gravity?"

"Maybe it has something to do with the cabin pressurization the guy was talking about," Casey looked backward for a minute and watched the earth turn to shades of blue and green over his shoulder.

"Some cabin," I observed. "There's no feeling of weightlessness, either."

"How do you know? We're buckled in. Could be you can't actually feel it. Maybe it's something that just... happens."

"I can tell because your hat is still on and the backpack is staying on the floor. In those videos they send back from the space shuttle, things are always floating around."



“Yeah, I guess so. Awful weird if you ask me. I wonder what Alpha One is.” “Whatever it is, I hope it’s bigger than this thing. The thought of being turned into a human satellite makes me feel kind of sick.”

“Me, too. It could be pretty bizarre if we had to stay like this very long. I mean, where would we –”

He was quiet for so long I finally tore my eyes off the blue green sphere of the earth and looked over at him, again. His mouth was open like he had been froze solid in mid-sentence.

“Hey, what’s the matter with –” That’s all the words I got out myself, before I saw what he was looking at.

I couldn’t believe it.

Up ahead of us, looming like a giant bug about to swallow us up, was some kind of space station. With lights blinking all around it. If this wasn’t real, I’d say we just stepped onto the set of the latest *Star Trek* episode.

Only it was real. I think.

But I wasn’t sure.

Because it was just like the movies. We pulled slowly into a sort of space hangar, where a big claw-like metal arm reached out and grabbed us. Like a magnet. Chink... Clunk...

Locked in.

I was too scared to move and felt goose bumps prickling up all over. Casey hadn’t budged an inch either. The buzz of the protective shield going down seemed as loud as a crack of lightning—and we jumped. After that it was totally quiet out there. Eerie.

But I guess we were getting out whether we wanted to, or not.

“Welcome to Alpha One,” said a deep voice through the speaker. “Please disembark to the left and exit through corridor ‘C’. An escort will assist you to a waiting area.”

“Holy cow!” I groaned. I was on the left.

For once I had to go first. That is, unless I wanted to sit there until the next ice age came along. I wondered what kind of escort we were going to get. At this point, nothing could surprise me. Except maybe an alien.

It wasn’t an alien.

At the end of the corridor—and believe me Casey and I were not breaking any records getting to the end of that corridor—a metal panel slid back and a midget size robot was standing there. It was your typical collection of blinking lights and wires, along with a set of ant-like antennae that reached out and brushed all over us for a few seconds. Sheesh.

A couple hundred light banks went off and on along its chest panel, and then a computer voice said, “You may proceed to briefing. Please have identification ready for inspection.” Then it turned around and rolled off down the hall with a lot of blips and bleeps, and a hum like there was a whole hive of bees cooped up inside.

“Identification...” Casey whispered, “all I’ve got is a belt buckle with my name on it.”

“I don’t have anything but a “Save the Rainforest” club card they gave me when I bought my vest this

morning,” I whispered back. “I wonder who’s going to inspect us?”

“Another droid, I guess.” The way his voice came out sort of shaky, I could tell he was just as scared as I was. “I hope they’re versatile enough to handle mistakes. Otherwise we could get classified as invaders.”

“Holy cow!”

“But Finkelstein probably thought of that. Looks like he thought of everything else.”

“I hope so. I’d rather get classified as a UFO or something. At least then we might get time to explain.”

The robot stopped at a stainless steel alcove off the corridor with a bench across the back. “Please be seated,” it said, and moved off to the side.

I guess it was going to stay there to make sure we didn’t get away. Not that we had anywhere to go. If ever there was a definition of an “awful fix to be in,” this was it. So, we sat down like we were told.

All of a sudden, there was a vibration in the walls and the bench we were sitting on. About the time I thought the place was going to turn into another kind of shuttle express, a set of iron bars came down in front of us. Now we were prisoners! Totally. With no way out. “Invaders!” Casey moaned. “What did I tell you?”

“Oh, holy cow!”

I don’t know how much time went by while we just sat there, but it seemed like forever. Hours, I thought. But every time I looked at my watch, only one or two minutes had gone by. Casey wasn’t doing much better.

He was tapping his foot, shaking his knee, and finally he got up off the bench and started to pace back and forth.

The robot didn't seem to notice, and if it did, it didn't care. It just stayed a few feet away from us on the other side of the bars, totally still. Except for a few small lights blinking and an occasional beep.

That's when I noticed a green gob of watermelon gum stuck on the back of Casey's heel. "Hey." I pointed to it. "I just found my gum."

"What?" He looked down. "Oh, for gosh sakes!"

I reached into one of my pockets for the empty wrapper. "Hold still." I knelt down to get it off.

But when I pulled, it was sort of gooey and came off with a long sticky string. It drooped onto the floor and stuck there. We were trying to clean it up with a couple more empty wrappers, when all of a sudden lights, beeps, and bleeps started going off all over the robot like firecrackers.

The computer voice said, "Emergency! Request sabotage unit to cell block 'C!' Immediate assistance required! Emergency!"

"Sabotage!" I stuffed the wrapper and gum-ball back into my pocket as fast as I could. "What the heck!"

"Back to the bench!" Casey whispered. "Hurry!"

We hit the bench at the same time and froze like statues. There was the high pitched whine of a door opening up somewhere down the corridor, and the sound of a hundred marching boots heading toward us!

We couldn't see anything on account of the bars,

*Cousin Summers*

but it sounded like we were about fifteen seconds away from a whole army coming after us. For the third time that day, I felt like I was going to start screaming and hollering like a crazy person. Only something inside told me it might get mistaken for aggressive type behavior, so I stifled it.

I looked over at Casey.

His eyes were shut tight and his mouth was moving... only no sound was coming out. I thought he was going for a silent prayer and I figured that maybe wasn't such a bad idea. But before I had a chance to get my eyes closed, a bunch of spacesuits came into view with giant ugly-looking ant heads on top.

Holy cow – they were aliens!

*“We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## DEADLY DROIDS

If ever there was a time to faint, this was it. I was so scared I think maybe my hair was even standing up. The aliens were all carrying some sort of guns—probably lasers—and I was wondering if it would hurt to get killed instantly. Sort of like when people who lose their legs can still feel their toes.

Nobody shot at us right away.

Instead, one of them stepped close and—after staring at us—said, “Oh, dear—oh, dear!” and grabbed hold of his head. There were a few seconds of pulling and tugging, and then the giant ugly thing went “pop!” and came off in his hands. Just like a helmet.

Which was what it really was. A fake ant head type thing that snapped onto his suit. The head underneath was totally human, with white hair and a bushy mustache... and pale blue eyes that looked sort of familiar.

“Dr. Finkelstein!” Casey gasped.

“Yes, but you...” He was totally amazed, like we

had just come down the Colorado rapids single-handed. “You’re nothing but children! How ever did you—my word, this is a problem. This is definitely a problem.”

“We were looking for you, sir!” Casey explained all in a rush, the way he did when we were caught off limits (and boy, were we off limits). “First, we discovered the elevator, and then —”

“Yes, I can see that. Well. You’d better come along so we can sort things out.”

Then he bent down, put one hand under the bars and raised them up. Just like a garage door. They weren’t even locked or anything. That was a disappointment. To think I hadn’t even tried to get out. I just sat down and started acting like a prisoner the minute I thought I was locked in.

Man. It just goes to show you never really know yourself until an experience like this comes along to test you. Then all kinds of things pop up you never know you had. Both good and bad.

“Come along,” said Dr. Finkelstein. “We’ll discuss this in the observatory.” He tucked the big ant head under his arm, like a football player leaving the field, and headed off down the corridor.

“Hey...” Casey pointed to the others. “What about them?”

Funny. Not one of those ant heads had moved an inch since they marched up. “They’re just machines,” Dr. Finkelstein explained. “Robots, if you will.”

“Oh, I get it,” Casey answered. “Like movie droids. Like, *Star Wars*.”

“Similar but not quite. I’ve already shut them down.”

Shut them down? As far as I knew, he hadn’t touched even one of them. Sheesh. I was beginning to think maybe it wasn’t so different from a movie set around here after all. Things were definitely not what they seemed. So, were we in space, or weren’t we? For all I knew it could have been one of those virtual reality things. Only bigger.

Really big.

We turned right at the end of corridor ‘C’ and stepped into an elevator that would take us all the way up to the observatory. Casey nudged me with his elbow and pointed to his stomach. I wondered how in the world he could be hungry at a time like this, when he leaned close and whispered, “No butterflies!” Meaning that funny feeling you get in your stomach when you’re going up fast in an elevator.

“Weird,” I whispered back.

“Very observant,” said Dr. Finkelstein. Like we were sitting in some classroom in school. “What you are experiencing is the lack of gravitational pull, brought on by the engagement of an automatic thrust capacitor. Similar to the one used in the shuttle you arrived on. Have you ever put the ends of two magnets together and watched them thrust away from each other?”

We nodded.

“Well, it’s like that. A bit more complicated but similar. In fact that very theory—which I call the



Polarity Theory—is what my entire enterprise is based on.”

“Wow,” I replied.

“Indeed,” said the Doctor, who was looking at me so hard I felt pegged. Like he could see right into my brain. It was sort of like having somebody barge into your room when it had been a while since you cleaned things up. It would be awful to have something embarrassing showing.

The doors opened and we stepped right out into space. At least that’s what it felt like. Actually, we were under a clear bubble type ceiling that looked out into the stars. The only thing solid was the floor. And a few pieces of furniture placed here and there. A desk with some papers on it, a couch, and a great big over stuffed chair that faced out toward the sky with the coolest black and gold telescope in front of it.

“Have a seat, boys,” Dr. Finkelstein pointed to the couch. “See how many constellations you can identify while I take a few minutes to get out of this suit. The thing is horribly old fashioned and uncomfortable.”

He disappeared through a door next to the elevator, which looked more like a round column sticking up out of the center of the floor than a room. It was totally smooth on all sides.

“Holy cow!” I whispered after he left. “I can’t believe we’re actually here—and that’s really him!”

“It’s him, all right! I’ve been looking for him so long, I’d know him anywhere! His hair is all white and he’s a lot older... but it’s him.”

“And he’s not dead, either.”

“That’s for sure. Ghosts can’t build things and—well, gosh—” He waved a hand toward the wide expanse of stars spread out in front of us. “Just look at all this! The Polarity Theory... gosh!”

“That must have been the secret stuff he was working on when he disappeared. I can’t believe I didn’t bring my camera. Pearl’s still carrying it around in her backpack, playing camera assistant.”

“Do you think he’ll explain anything to us? Even though we’re kids, I mean.”

“He seemed to talk easy enough in the elevator,” I reasoned. “Maybe if you hadn’t talked to anyone in twenty years, you wouldn’t care if they were kids, or not.”

“Who says I haven’t talked to anyone in twenty years?” said a voice so close behind us, we both jumped.

We hadn’t even heard him come back in. Now he was standing right there next to us in a regular suit and tie, looking like somebody’s grandfather.

“The truth is, I am well known in a number of places as Professor Henry Cooper. I may have dropped out of organized science, boys, but I’m no hermit. You may call me Professor, almost everybody does.”

Ping! The elevator door opened up.

“Well, now...” He sat down between us on the couch. “Here comes our tea.”

There was the sound of bees again, and another midget sized robot came rolling in. It wasn’t the same

as our escort. This one had a big metal box in the middle where the light panel should have been. And there were no antennae, either. Instead, it had a flat top with a red and blue tablecloth, and a little jar of purple flowers sitting on it.

“Heather,” Dr. Finkelstein explained, like he had read my mind. “Lovely in Scotland this time of year. I couldn’t resist bringing back a few blooms from my last visit. Sugar, boys?”

He opened a door in the box and took out a tray full of chocolate cookies, three cups, and a silver teapot with a cream and sugar bowl to match. They looked more like they came from an old fashioned farmhouse than a space kitchen.

Now that I knew I wasn’t going to die, I was starved all of a sudden. So was Casey. We must have put away at least a dozen cookies between us, but the “Professor” didn’t seem to care. Not even when Casey dumped three spoons of sugar in his tea along with a half a cup of cream.

He asked us our names and where we were from, and we told him everything. I mean everything. Right down to why we were snooping around the Jefferson City Museum and how we thought he was a ghost. Casey even said how great it would be to get famous if we found all the top-secret data he had been working on. I felt a little embarrassed about that. Admitting to someone you are trying to get famous is sort of like belching in public. It just isn’t done.

“I see.” Dr. Finkelstein got up and began to pace.

“And I can see that something is going to have to be done about all this immediately.”

“I’ll say,” I spoke up. “I’m going to be in big time trouble if I’m not standing in Dad’s office at five-thirty. With Pearl. I could get grounded for the rest of the summer if I’m not.”

“Me, too,” Casey added. “My Aunt Bill is pretty cool but she’ll cut off all my privileges for sure if she finds out I left the planet.”

“Oh, it’s much more serious than that, I’m afraid,” said Dr. Finkelstein. “You see, what I’m working on here is still top-secret.”

“But everybody thinks you’re dead,” Casey reminded him. “Or, is that just your cover and you still work for NASA?”

“I should say not!” he answered like the idea sounded awful to him. “I gave up working for organized science many years ago. Had to. Why, can either of you imagine what would happen down there if they got their hands on the Polarity Theory?”

Casey and I just stared because we didn’t have a clue.

“They would turn it over to the military, that’s what,” he answered for us. “And it would be used for purposes of war!”

He slammed a fist into the palm of his hand for emphasis, loosened his tie, and began pacing a little faster. “Well, boys... that’s not the kind of science I am dedicated to. No, sir! It’s time for a new kind of science. A whole world science! And until they all stop

scrapping and fighting long enough to get one... well... I won't be sharing any of my discoveries with anyone."

"Not anyone?" I asked. "What about scientific integrity and all that? Your place in history. Don't you at least want to share your discoveries with a trusted colleague?"

"What's scientific integrity?" Casey wanted to know.

"A fundamental truth that stands up to the test of time," I quoted like I was reading out of a text book. But with two parents that were scientists, I practically grew up with that phrase. "I mean, what good is a discovery if you never share it with anyone?"

"The world isn't ready for what I've discovered," said Dr. Finkelstein sadly.

"Nobody was ready for Einstein when he came along, either," I reasoned. "But he still gave us his theories. And scientists are still puzzling over them. At least, that's what my dad says."

Uh-oh. I must have said the wrong thing. Because he stopped pacing all of a sudden, turned around, and bored into my brain with those piercing blue eyes, again.

"Funny you should put it that way, young man," he said. "Especially the part about Einstein. Because what I have achieved here..." He gave a sweeping gesture toward the stars. "...began with Einstein. That intriguing theory of his:  $E=MC^2$ ."

"Oh." Casey spoke up like a light just dawned on him. "The Theory of Relativity. Now, I get it."

“Yes.” Dr. Finkelstein seemed pleased, all of a sudden. Like another brilliant idea just popped into his mind. “Quite right, my boy.” He began to pace again. “The Theory of Relativity. My Polarity Theory is based on that, only it goes farther. It goes... beyond Einstein.”

He turned around to look at us, again, and this time his eyes were practically flashing. “I see now why you’ve come. It is your... destiny.”

Something about the way he said that made me feel like a prisoner again. Like he had gone a little loony being up here all alone and was maybe going to keep us here. Forever. On account of we knew too much.

Our destiny, he said.

Having dedicated most of my life to trying to get famous through scientific discovery, I should have been excited. This could actually turn out to be the big one. You know. Hour of opportunity, and all that. But at the moment, famous didn’t look so great to me anymore.

Instead, I was thinking how awful it would be not to ever see Mom and Dad, or Pearl, again. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t so sure being famous (or even written down in a history book) was worth it. I hate to admit this, but at that particular moment I think I would have traded the whole Polarity Theory for one phone call home.

Even if it did go for war and deadly droids.

*“Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE YOUNG SCIENTIFICS

“I’ll train you myself,” said Dr. Finkelstein. “Re-educate you, so to speak. I don’t know why I never came up with the idea sooner. A new breed of scientists. Young scientists! Yes, indeed.”

“Uh... how long would it take?” I was worried.

“Take? Why, the rest of your lives,” he said. “One never stops learning in the field of science. Even if he lives to be a hundred.”

Oh, holy cow—he was going to keep us here! I suddenly wished I hadn’t eaten so many cookies because they were starting to feel like a lump of lead in my stomach.

“Wow!” Casey pushed his safari hat back off his forehead so he could see better. “You mean we’re really going to see all that secret data?”

“In time, my boy. In time. When you’ve proven to me you can handle it without hurting anybody. But first we will have to find out some things. We will have to get down to basics.”

He headed for the telescope and Casey jumped off

the couch and followed him with the same enthusiasm of a dog that gets to go for a walk.

“Excuse me, Dr. Finkelstein,” I interrupted. “Uh, I mean, Professor, sir...” I took a deep breath because I figured it was now or never. “But my, uh... family... is going to be basically upset if I never show up again. Basically speaking, that is.”

He looked at us with a sudden suspicious scowl. “You’re not a couple of runaways, are you?”

“Oh, no—no, sir!” we both sputtered out the words at the same time.

I had the feeling the old guy could get pretty ferocious if he ever got mad about something. So, I tried to explain better. “It’s just that... well, they keep us on a pretty short leash out there at the museum. Rules, check-in times and all that.”

“Interesting,” he replied. “I would have assumed two young men wandering around company basements and rifling through invaluable artifacts from the Sutter Expedition, wouldn’t be on any leash at all. Or, have things changed that much since I left?”

“But you see, sir,” Casey took over, “we weren’t rifling through anything. We were just—”

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Dr. Finkelstein interrupted. “But in order to access the elevator to my sub-station, I believe a certain crate has to be opened.”

“Yes, sir,” I admitted. “But we didn’t break anything.”

“And do you always make a habit of climbing into rickety, malfunctioning elevators—or anything else that



moves?”

“Well...” Even Casey was running out of excuses by that time.

“I dare say, you’re the first in twenty years to accomplish it. Which means it is no longer a secret, and the station will have to be shut down. Haven’t used it in some time, anyway. Not since the development of—”

“But how will we get back?” I suddenly blurted it out. So much for skirting the issue. I was starting to feel panicky and just had to know.

“Good heavens, young man. Are you suggesting I might be entertaining the thought of keeping you boys here against your will?”

“The thought crossed my mind,” I answered. “What with the bars coming down and the aliens and all.”

“But, Pete...” Casey had already changed over to Dr. Finkelstein’s side. “All that was just an illusion. Right, Professor?”

“Absolutely,” he answered. “When there’s only one of you to handle all this...” He waved his arm to include the whole sky. “You have to use your brains. It’s a big responsibility being the sole protector of a force so powerful it must never be turned deadly.”

“Aliens,” I muttered. “You sure had me fooled.”

“It did the trick, all right,” Casey agreed. “How did you come up with the idea, Professor?”

“Oh, it wasn’t hard. Just take a look at what people are watching on TV. Aliens—droids—they’re all the rage. I created my robot droids merely to give myself time to assess the situation in the event we should be

visited by intruders here on Alpha One.”

“The elevator back at the museum wasn’t really broke either, was it?” Casey guessed. “You just fixed it to scare people away.”

“Didn’t work, obviously,” said the Professor. “I was banking on the fact that most people have an aversion to elevators. That...” He gave us the stern look, again. “Anyone in their right mind, would not purposely set foot in a broken one.”

“Oh, we weren’t in our right minds,” Casey popped off. There he went telling embarrassing stuff about us again. “We were scared stiff. And if we hadn’t had to go back for the flashlight, we would have been out of there!”

“Still, there will be others now. Best to shut it down. Especially since I don’t need it anymore. You see, boys...” His eyes got almost wild with excitement this time. Like now that he had decided to tell somebody, he might bust if he didn’t hurry up and tell it. “I have not only discovered how to use the force of polarity, I’ve learned how to control it.”

“Wow,” I whispered. But I didn’t exactly know “wow, what?” because I didn’t really know what the Polarity Theory was. Except that it was something totally major. Sheesh. There I went getting carried away with something again, just because everybody else was.

Casey was so excited, he took his hat off, and started squashing it between his hands like a Nerf ball. “Gosh...” he said. Then he said it again, only better. “Gosh!”

“I can’t let you in on it right away, of course,” The Professor explained. “First, there will have to be a... test of some sort.” He smoothed down his long white mustache while he thought about that for a minute.

“You mean, on  $E=MC^2$ , and all that sort of stuff?” Casey worried. “Heck, I never was too good with formulas.”

“No, no,” the Professor assured. “All that can come later. I’m talking about integrity, not intelligence. Why, the average brain has ninety seven percent more potential than is ever used up. People simply don’t know how to tap into it, yet. No, boys...”

Now, he began to pace back and forth in front of the stars, with his hands behind his back. “What needs to be examined here is integrity!” He thumped a fist into the palm of his hand to emphasize the point. “Are you honest? Are you trustworthy? But most importantly... are you noble?”

“Gosh!” Casey whispered.

“Noble?” I didn’t get it. I mean, my idea of noble was King Arthur and the Round Table.

Or, maybe some unusually good dog. Like, Lassie.

“Noble,” the Professor said the word again as he looked right at me. “That is exactly what I mean. Can you put aside yourself for others, as a good soldier must fight for a cause, no matter how scared he is? Can you set aside personal fame and fortune?”

“Fame and fortune?” I gasped. “But isn’t that what all explorers and scientists are ultimately after? A place in the history books? The Nobel Prize? Even Indiana

Jones admitted it was all for fortune and glory. Right?"

"Wrong," said the Professor. "Fame and fortune is all wrong. The true scientist must seek the truth, no matter the cost. And he must preserve that truth for the betterment of mankind. And... the future."

He looked us both over like X-rays, and his eyes were almost flashing with strange excitement again. "The future is very important, boys. It is the worthy cause we must dedicate our lives to. It is more important than ourselves. And the very act of making it more important than ourselves, is what makes us... noble."

"Gosh," Casey breathed the word out like a sigh this time.

"I will give you each a secret," he pronounced. "And if you can keep that secret—like an Indian warrior keeps the sacred eagle feather—I shall allow you to become my students. You will be my greatest contribution to science. A new breed of scientists! You will be my young...scientifics!"

The idea shot into my brain like an electric current running through. The Young Scientifics... it almost sounded like a documentary series. A real one.

"Then," said the Professor, "and only then, will I allow you to come with me... beyond Einstein."

"What if we can't keep the secret?" I blurted out.

"But, my boy," he answered back, "what if you can?"

He had a point. And he definitely had our interest. I mean, we were sitting there like two couch potatoes,

glued to every word. By now Casey's hat was so squashed it would never look the same again. And it wasn't until then I realized I had been holding my breath for so long, it came gushing out of my lungs like a beach ball when you let all the air out.

Sheesh.

"Well," The Professor looked at his watch. "It's after four, already... your time. We'll have to continue this discussion en route."

"En route?" I stammered, "en route to where?"

"The museum, naturally. Didn't you say you had to check in by five-thirty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we will have to leave right away. Come along, we'll take the *Intrepid*."

"The *Intrepid*?"

"Yes. It's my greatest invention. Much more advanced than that little shuttle you arrived here on. Though I admit it pleases me to find that it's still in good working order."

He started for the elevator and we followed.

"You see," he went on talking as the door closed us all in. Funny thing about that elevator... there weren't any buttons to push. "I wasn't exactly sure if the Automatic Thrust Capacitor would lose some of its magnetic force over a period of time. Now, I see that after nearly five years, it is as resilient as ever. So, that settles that."

"What would have happened if it had?" I asked. "Lost some of its force, I mean."

“Why, it would have either crashed on lift off,” he replied as a matter-of-fact. “Or been unable to hold its coordinates and gone shooting off into space.”

“Crashed on lift off?” Casey went white as a sheet.

“Shooting off into space?” I gulped, feeling suddenly sick inside. “Holy cow! You mean, we could have been –”

“Quite,” said the Professor. “Which should teach you something about jumping into contraptions you know nothing about.”

“But we could have been killed!” I groaned.

“Or lost in space forever!” Casey added.

“Indeed,” said the Professor. “But it’s a little late to be thinking about it now, isn’t it? I’d say you are lucky to be alive. Incidents like that are just what kills people young. Quite dishonorable.”

“Dishonorable?” I muttered mostly to myself. There he went again, using words in the weirdest places. It made a person have to think twice about what they meant.

“Of course, dishonorable. Haven’t either of your parents ever discussed with you the importance of following rules?”

“Sure, but –”

“But what? You think we adults get some sort of pleasure out of not letting you do things?”

The elevator door slid open, and there we were in a garage type place with a big silvery spaceship parked (or should I say hovering in the mid-air) right in front of us. No kidding. It could have been the actual set to *Star*

*Trek*, because it was that cool. I mean, totally. Only this wasn't TV. What's more, the Professor headed off toward the thing with all the casualness of a guy climbing into his car.

"Rules, gentlemen..." He continued on with his talk as we started up a long metal walkway to the top of the spaceship. "Are merely safeguards against disaster. Everyone knows it's human nature to do things without thinking sometimes. Especially when you're young. If one follows rules, one is less apt to foul up. Simple as that."

"But some rules are stupid." Casey peeked over the rail at the long way down and then jerked his head up again like it was too scary.

"Quite," the Professor agreed. "But children seldom have the sheer strength or thinking processes that are mature enough to tell which is which. So, the honor part comes in. I believe someone famous once said, '*Children, honor your father and mother, so you can live longer on the earth.*' It's a matter of trust, actually. Trusting that they have your best in mind until you are strong enough to decide what is best for yourself. Here we are."

The door we walked up to was already open and a tall, skinny droid was standing by. Just like a stewardess when you get on a plane.

"Ah, Miss Beta," said the Professor—like it was the everyday thing for a stewardess to look like she was all wiring and switches. "I should like a word with the Captain, please. And would you be so kind as to patch

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

us through to Alpha Two?”

“Certainly, Professor. Should I prepare the Young Scientifics for monitoring?”

“That would be splendid. We’ve already had a little discussion about rules, so I’m sure they won’t give you any trouble. Right, boys?”

If we had known then what “monitoring” was, we might not have been so quick to agree.



*“Information is not knowledge.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## FINKELSTEIN’S EYE

It was pretty strange the way the droids knew everything so fast. I mean, hadn’t the Professor just come up with the idea of us being Young Scientifics right there in the observatory? And now this Miss Beta droid down here in the garage was already calling us Young Scientifics, and asking if he wanted her to prepare us.

Sheesh. The only thing I ever thought of a stewardess preparing was a meal in flight. Or maybe handing out soda and peanuts. Of course, they could tell you how to use the oxygen mask if anything went wrong, or how to turn your seat into a life preserver.

I always thought that was pretty silly, considering most crashes don’t occur over water. What passengers really need to be told is how to eject and pop an emergency parachute if something goes wrong. But then, what do kids know?

So, as Casey and I followed Miss Beta into the

spaceship through one door, the Professor disappeared through another. Obviously, he had more important things to do than hear the talk about safety rules.

That's what I was thinking and I guess that's why I went along so easy. Let's face it, if following rules was going to help me live longer, I wanted to find out the rules. Casey must have felt the same way because he followed along like he was in a trance or something. Hypnotized.

Boy, if all this was just an illusion, it was the greatest invention since video games.

All the walls and ceiling of the spacecraft were stainless steel, and the floors were covered with blue, rubbery looking door mat stuff. Probably for traction, since it would have been slippery trying to walk on stainless steel. First we went down a short hallway with no windows or doors. Just a couple of lights glowing from the ceiling.

The next door that opened made us stop dead in our tracks. Grounded. Rooted to the floor like flagpoles. There in front of us, with humming equipment and strange glowing stuff bubbling through tubes— exactly like we had imagined it--was Finkelstein's Lab.

No bones. No ghosts.

It wasn't even shut down.

As a matter of fact, it was pretty obvious the place was in full-blown operation. Running to capacity. There were droids everywhere! Each a little different from the other, depending on their job. And they were all busy.

For instance, one was standing in front of a huge

electronic type map of space, keeping track of little blips and dots that were moving around on it. Monitoring, I guess. Another droid was typing data into a huge computer, and next to that was a big black glass panel that was practically six feet long, with steps leading up to it.

“Please remove shoes and socks for identification,” said Miss Beta, “and proceed through the identity chamber.”

“You first,” I nudged Casey. I didn’t even pretend to want the honor. “You’re the brave explorer. I’m more into research, myself.”

“If this isn’t research,” he answered, “I don’t know what is.”

“That’s just it. I need time to observe and take it all in.”

“Right.” Casey sat down on the floor long enough to take off his shoes and that’s when I noticed he had two different color socks on. Right when I was wondering if maybe he was color blind, he caught me staring and said, “Ah, Jim gets a kick out of tossing everything out of my underwear drawer. I don’t even have two that match anymore.”

Then he joined Miss Beta up over at the steps.

“Follow directions at each station,” she instructed without going in with him, “and proceed through all seven stations without stopping, please. The Professor will delay lift-off until you are able to join him.”

That was the last I saw of Casey until it was all over. I might have worried if I hadn’t been totally

hypnotized by what started coming up on the screen. That's what the big black panel was... a screen.

First, a few numbers came up slowly on the top right hand side, where he had just walked in. The way they were showing up I knew Casey was back there, punching in his social security number somewhere. After a few seconds, a whole ton of information came rolling up under the heading: Tucker, Cason James. Birth-date and place, and... wow... he never mentioned anything about his parents being lawyers before.

Man. Just when you think you know someone.

After that, two handprints and two feet showed up. Then an eye--like it was blinking right into a video camera--and finally, a close-up of the inside of his ear. Next came the sound of his voice, but what showed up on the screen were horizontal lights and impulses moving up and down. Sort of like what you see on the front of expensive stereos. It sounded like he was reading something, or maybe trying to remember a poem from kindergarten.

"Casey Tucker. Uh... Jack and Jill went up the hill... to, uh... to fetch a pail of --"

All of a sudden, there was a loud awful-sounding buzz--like on a game show when you're wrong--and Casey hollered out like somebody had pinched him back there. I would have worried if the next minute he wasn't laughing like a hyena, and then it got quiet again.

We were about halfway through the screen.

There were a couple more seconds of silence, and

then his whole skeleton showed up. Moving around and everything. It was totally cool. I could actually see his heart—like a tiny mist of a cloud—beating with a steady *boo-boom, boo-boom*—right inside his rib cage.

After that a long string of circles connected with lines came on, and a bunch of information I didn't understand past the first two words: DNA structure. That and his blood type was 0. A little chill ran up the back of my neck trying to figure out how they got that information.

It was quiet for so long then, I started to wonder if I maybe shouldn't peek inside to see if he was OK. Then a message popped up in flashing red letters:

Monitoring device installation complete.

“Holy cow!” I gasped. “What’s going on in there?”

About that time, a life size color video showed up on the end of the screen. It was Casey. Big smile on his face. He looked like he was waving through an airport window at Santa Clause or something. So, I guess he was all right.

“Next.” Miss Beta, turned her lights and blinkers on me.

“Oh, holy cow. . .” I muttered. But if Casey could do it and come out smiling, I guess I could, too.

I took off my shoes.

It's a lot worse worrying about what's happening to someone else than going through the experience yourself. Not counting being kidnapped or mugged, that is. Anyway, the identification chamber turned out to be a series of seven stations—some sitting and some

standing—where you had to do whatever came up on an inside screen. The first was just what I thought: I had to type in my social security number.

Next, I had to stand on a square of black glass and put my hands on the screen... feet and handprint time... then look into a microscope type thing... and then hold a phone up to my ear.

Nobody was home. So, I guess it was some kind of camera.

After that was something called voice impression samples. I had to sit on a narrow chair I practically had to squeeze myself into, and say my name out loud before reciting a poem.

“Peter Baker. Uh... ‘Twas the night before Christmas when all through the —”

Along with that long awful sounding buzz that interrupted me, the chair turned into a whoopee cushion, and I heard myself hollering about as loud as Casey had. Before that was over, it turned into a tickle machine that vibrated against my ribs and the back of my knees. I couldn’t help laughing my head off, either.

Natural responses, I guess.

Next, I had to walk past another black screen but I knew from watching earlier, it was an X-ray and my skeleton was showing up on the other side. This station was called the “Internal Structures Division.” About the time I was wondering when the blood thing was coming, a line said:

Press thumb against screen.

Hmmm... another fingerprint. So, I pressed. There

was a flash of light and I heard a little click like a camera had taken a picture. That was it. I didn't feel a thing. But then a courtesy cotton ball popped out of a tiny chute and I realized my thumb was bleeding a little.

Sheesh.

It was over before I even realized it happened. After that came the dental station. At least that's what I thought it was. There was a droid with all the familiar looking tooth cleaning equipment, and a chair I had to lean back in. About the time I thought my parents were at least going to be pleased I got a free cleaning out of the deal, it was over. I mean I barely had time to open wide. A little warm pressure on one of my back molars, and the droid said, "All done, Peter. Would you like to rinse?" Just like the nurse in a dental office.

"Sure," I answered, and she squirted a little stream of water into my mouth and let me spit into a vacuum.

After that I walked through a black curtain and stepped up to a window type thing. For a minute I couldn't see anything at all through it. Then a computer voice said:

"Congratulations, Peter Baker, you are now an official cadet of the Young Scientific program. Please greet the units who are now at your service and ready to assist you."

All of a sudden I could see hundreds of them through that window. Way more than could fit into the lab. It's like I could see them stretching on and on forever. Big ones, little ones, fat ones, skinny ones... all blinking and waving at me like I was the latest

Hollywood celebrity. What a feeling!

I couldn't help it—everything went to my head. I could feel myself grinning from ear to ear as I waved back at them. And I thought: if this isn't fame and fortune, it was definitely the next best thing.

At the exit, a little droid with a light on its head reached out claw-like hands and picked something off a conveyor belt that was passing through a space in the wall. He made a few adjustments with a screwdriver. There were a series of musical blips and zips, and he handed it over to me.

"I'm Houston, Peter. Second Lieutenant in charge of communications. Here is your Alpha Band. It looks like an ordinary watch, but is really your sat-link with the station. It is waterproof and should be worn at all times. Welcome aboard."

"Thank you, sir."

"Just Houston will do."

"Thanks, Houston."

"You may proceed to the bridge now. The Professor is waiting."

I walked out of that identification chamber feeling like it was Christmas or something. Which was strange considering the fact that everything I said or did from now on was going to be monitored by Alpha One. I mean it was pretty obvious that some type of radio device had been put on my back molar. I ran my tongue over it but I couldn't feel anything.

Sheesh.

There wasn't anything Finkelstein wouldn't know



*Cousin Summers*

about now.

But who cared? I was an “official cadet of the Young Scientific program,” and I couldn’t wait to get started.

I think maybe I was brainwashed.

*“It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## SECRETS OF THE DINOSAUR PLANET

The bridge—or command center—of the *Intrepid*, was just like the movies. There were big windows that circled around the front, with lots of control panels and consoles underneath where the droids were busy working.

We sat in some seats on a high platform along one side, where we would be able to see everything that went on and still have a good view of the stars. It was totally cool.

“Well, boys,” the Professor began as we buckled ourselves into the seats, “You are now on a training mission—or test—if that’s what you prefer.”

“I like training mission,” Casey piped up around a mouthful of peanuts. I guess there were some similarities between Miss Beta and other stewardesses, after all.

“And because of the importance of future missions,” the Professor continued, “everything you say and do during this training will be monitored through Alpha

One.”

“You mean you’re going to keep an eye on us twenty four hours a day?” Casey asked. I guess because he hadn’t seen what was going on the screen while he was inside the identification chamber, he didn’t realize exactly what had happened in there. He definitely hadn’t seen the words, *Monitoring device installation complete*. I’d have to fill him in later.

“My units will do most of the monitoring,” said the Professor. “And they will deliver a report of pertinent information to me each day. Of course...” He looked at us both with that serious, not-to-be-fooled-with expression of his. “If anything that requires my attention should occur at odd hours, I assure you I will be notified immediately.”

“In other words, don’t goof off,” Casey interpreted.

“Precisely,” he agreed.

“So, what exactly is our mission? This training one, I mean.” I figured it was probably something like helping him close down the substation at the museum, and then keep the whole thing secret. Long enough to make sure he could trust us. Which was fine with me. This whole experience was going to take some getting used to, and at that moment, I was just glad he was letting us go home, again.

It was all pretty clever, actually. I mean, even if we failed nothing much could come of it. After all, who would believe us if we went around saying we had been to space? A couple of loony kids, that’s all. The kind that get carried away by their imaginations and

watching too much TV.

Especially if all the evidence was gone.

Yep. Dr. Finkelstein was a genius. Which was why I was totally shocked at his answer. “I intend to give you each something of value,” he explained. “Something you have both always wanted. A discovery, so to speak. And what you do with that discovery will determine whether or not you will have any further association with Alpha One.”

“You mean if we fail we’ll never see you again?” Casey blurted out. A worried expression came over his face and I don’t think he even realized he was talking with his mouth full.

“Exactly.”

“What about our watches—I mean, our Alpha bands?” I asked. I sort of liked mine already and was hoping we could at least keep them as souvenirs.

No such deal.

“The technology is far too advanced if they should fall into the wrong hands,” said the Professor. “So, they include a built-in self destruct device. In the event you fail, they will simply disappear.”

“Gosh.” Casey looked his over.

“Holy cow,” I whispered, feeling a little bit what it would be like to lose before we even got started.

“Well, then. With those thoughts in mind, I suggest we get down to business. We’ll begin with the Sutter Expedition.”

“The Sutter Expedition?” I tried to make a connection. “What do dinosaurs have to do with

space?”

“It’s all relative, Peter,” said the Professor as he motioned to Miss Beta that we were ready. “Remember Einstein? Everything is relative, my boy.”

Miss Beta hummed down the isle and pulled a screen in front of our nearest window. There she went, acting like a stewardess again. But how could he expect us to be interested in a movie when we were getting a first rate, true-life experience of space travel? I mean what could compare to zipping through stars and maybe even seeing a meteor flash by?

Virtual reality, that’s what.

And you wouldn’t believe what happened next.

Miss Beta cleared away our soda glasses and peanut wrappers, and handed us each a set of headphones. Only they weren’t your regular type headphones. These had some kind of binocular-looking eyeglasses attached to them. Putting them on was like...

Well, the only thing I can think of to describe them is, it was like going back in time. Even more than yesterday when Pearl and I went busting into the temple exhibit.

It was incredible.

At first everything was totally black. And silent. Then a bright orange pen-point of light appeared and started to get bigger and bigger... like a light coming on...

It was a sunrise.

I could hear some kind of far off chanting. Exotic. The primitive stuff you hear at the beginning of African

movies when the safari is hacking its way slowly through the jungle. As it got lighter, I could see that it was a jungle. And I was seeing it from high up, moving in over the tops of the trees like a camera zooming in for a close shot.

There was a clearing, and a big wide, steaming lake with dinosaurs moving around it. One--a brontosaur--was actually in the water, ducking its long neck and head under every once in a while to get a mouthful of water ferns.

It was so real I thought sure I could even feel the heat of the place. The steaminess of it, and the groans and roars of those giant dinosaurs while they were feeding actually vibrated against my own bones. Like Dolby stereo in a car when some smart case turns the volume up all the way without rolling the windows down and it feels like it's right inside you.

At one end of the steaming lake was a cluster of tall trees with some weird sounding shrieks and whistles coming from them. Inside those branches I could see moving shapes and shadows. As it got lighter, I realized it was the nesting place for a whole flock of pterodactyls. One mother was tearing off huge bloody chunks of something and stuffing it into the snapping beaks of her babies. If you could call them that. They were so ugly they gave me the creeps.

Right about the time I felt like I was sitting in on a 3-D horror movie, a deep rumbling started up and the ground began to move. It was an earthquake! I mean it was so real, I could feel my seat shaking. I had to hang

on to the armrests just to keep myself from snatching off the headset for a minute to remind myself it wasn't real.

But heck—I sure didn't want anyone else to know. And I would sit on my hands before I'd let myself panic and rip them off. This isn't real, this isn't real, I reminded myself. It's just a movie.

All of a sudden, a boiling hot water geyser came shooting up out of the lake. Right out of the middle of the lake—spitting and spewing steam all over the place. The brontosaur roared like it was scared half to death, and tried to jump and claw its way out of there, sending waves of hot water splashing out over the banks.

About the same time, a huge explosion rocked through the place, and there—right in front of my own eyes—I saw the whole top blow off of a mountain that was close by. Right behind where the pterodactyls were nesting. In seconds, there was hot fiery lava spewing out of the hole and way up into the sky.

The pterodactyls all started to screech and take to the air, but there was another loud BOOM! and the whole side of the mountain blew out. When it did, it sent a giant wall of lava down right on top of them. Hardly any of them got high enough to fly out of its way.

Then, BANG! There was a loud clap of thunder. Then another and another. In a few minutes it started to rain. The land surface was so hot that the first drops just popped and hissed into steam when they hit. Then it really started to pour.

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

I mean, it seemed to me like every cloud in the world opened up. Water coming from everywhere! I could see rivers where I hadn't seen them before. And the lake was swelling and creeping over its banks so fast, it was like a blotch of spilt chocolate when you try to sop it up with a napkin.

For a minute, I could have sworn I heard people screaming—hundreds of them. Only maybe it was the few pterodactyls left that were still trying to battle their way through those torrential skies. Everything was melting together in a wet sappy mess. And as I watched, I could see the great shiny backs of a few surviving dinosaurs lumbering away.

It was the end of the age, and I had seen it with my own eyes. Fade to black.

Silence.

It was so quiet I could hear my own breathing, and I realized I was sitting on my hands after all. What a show! I had to admit it had scared the juice out of me. My heart felt like it was going to bust out of my chest. It was pounding so hard, I was worried I might have even hollered.

Sheesh.

I figured I better get hold of myself. I took a deep breath and was about to pull the headset off, when I saw another sudden dot of light on the screen...

Uh-oh. Here we go, again.

Only this time, the sounds I heard were familiar to me. The chink, chink, chink of hammer on rock, and a dozen murmuring voices...



It was an archaeological dig!

People were working in a tunnel with some lights strung up to see by, and once again I felt like a camera, zooming over the tops of their heads. The tunnel opened out into a larger corridor, and there—with about a dozen people working on it—was the same wall Casey and I saw under the museum this afternoon! And they were excavating the pterodactyl bones! Two guys were arguing off camera. I couldn't see them. But what they were saying was coming in loud and clear.

“I know very well what we're standing on, Jefferson, and I know exactly what it means! This is the site of a cataclysmic catastrophe that either happened in three different ages at once, or some serious changes are going to have to be made in the textbooks.”

“There must be another explanation, Sutter,” the other voice said. “There has to be!”

“But we're on the brink of scientific truth here! And you and I both know that truth—when brought to light—has a tendency to explain itself.”

“This thing is bigger than we are.”

“On that point, I agree.”

“One of us needs to —”

“I'm not leaving, Jefferson. I'm not leaving until every shred of evidence here is boxed and crated, and sent out into the finest museums in the world. My contribution to the enlightenment of mankind. Wait and see. Someday... the Sutter Expedition will be a household word.”

Over.

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

Fade to black again.

A household word? My own parents were dinosaur specialists. I'd spent my life around that stuff and I never even heard of the Sutter Expedition. At least not until Casey and I stumbled into those basement rooms today. The word never got out. Not at all. What's more, the only museum those artifacts ever saw was a hidden room in the lowest basement level of the Jefferson City...

Jefferson!

Oh, holy cow—it was a cover up! One of the biggest and ugliest kinds, on account of it affected the whole world. And nobody—I mean nobody—had found out about it, yet.

Except Casey and me.

*“Anyone who doesn't take truth seriously in small matters cannot be trusted in large ones either.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## THE TRAINING MISSION

“Well,” said the Professor as Miss Beta collected our headsets and rolled up the screen again, “there you have it. The story of the Sutter Expedition.”

“Gosh!” Casey stared straight ahead as if he was still watching. He wiped at a little trickle of sweat that was on his forehead and repeated it. “Gosh!”

“Nothing ever came of it, did it Professor,” I asked. “The discovery, I mean.”

“Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that.” He smiled like it didn't really matter. The discovery of the century and it didn't matter? “In a way, all my work here is based on the Sutter discoveries. But as for the rest of the world...”

He stirred more cream into a second cup of coffee and a little drip from the spoon got on the notes he had been reading while we watched the show. “The rest of the world knows nothing about it. Greed got in the way. And a lot of that fame and fortune business.”

“How did you find out about it?” Casey asked. “From the way those people were dressed, it looked like it happened a long time ago. Way before the space age.”

“Yes it did,” he answered. “You see, there was a young paleontologist from Germany on that expedition. By the name of Finkelstein. He married Dr. Sutter’s daughter, Nora, and a few years later, I was born into what had become a well kept secret.”

“I’ll say it was well kept,” I muttered. “Man! Didn’t anybody feel like it was their duty as scientists to share it with the rest of the world?”

“For a long time they thought it was being shared,” the Professor explained. “The Sutter Expedition remained in the field, and Jefferson went back to the city to handle the administrative end. Funding, exhibits and all that. By the time anyone realized he was simply building an empire for himself, the Sutter Expedition had vanished.”

“You mean, everybody just, disappeared?” Casey gasped.

“Quite into thin air, I’m afraid. Jefferson became a multi-millionaire. Publishing houses, research centers. In the end, he built the whole Jefferson City Museum complex, right over the top of the original discovery site.”

“How come you never told?” I blurted out.

The Professor looked over at me like a teacher that had to explain the simple steps to a math problem all over again. “Seeing how Jefferson misused most of what we shared with him for his own personal gains, I

finally decided it was best that way. Especially after my work on the lunar buggy. War and Weapons! It seems that was all anyone was interested in back in those days. So, I kept the real secrets of the Sutter discoveries—which we uncovered later—to myself. That is, until you boys came along.”

“They’re still fighting wars down there, you know,” I admitted. I thought maybe he hadn’t heard. “Any night you turn on the news you can hear about somebody bombing somebody.”

“And the crime,” Casey added, like he was maybe a little ashamed of it himself. “It’s turned into a sort of war all by itself, Professor. Actually, you’re pretty lucky to live up here, away from it all.”

“Oh, I don’t live up here, boys. I just work here. Like I said, I’m simply known as a retired professor where I come from. It gives me the time I need for research, and still allows me the vital link I must have to supply my projects. I couldn’t do all this without material to work with.”

“Where do you live, Professor?” Casey asked eagerly. “In case we ever need to —”

The Professor held up his hand like in class when the teacher wants quiet. It worked, because Casey stopped in mid-sentence with his mouth hanging open. “All in time, my boy. All in good time. But right now we must deal with the matters at hand. In a few minutes we will be docking.”

I snatched a quick look outside. It was still black space out there. But the earth was getting bigger and

bigger ahead of us, and I could pick out the familiar shape of continents through the clouds as they slowly passed by.

“Hey!” Casey pointed suddenly. “Look at that – it’s a fire! It must be a monstrous big one to be able to see it all the way up here!”

“That,” said the Professor sadly, “is one of the heartbreaks of our generation. It is the last remaining outpost of true nature. Within its wilderness lie the secrets of health and restoration for the entire planet... and it’s burning!”

“The rainforest!” I felt the kind of lump in my throat you get in a sad movie. I had just joined a club to save that very place this morning. But the way it looked from up here, we better do something about it pretty quick.

“Indeed,” the Professor replied. “It’s rather like the dinosaurs, I’m afraid. Some of them lumbered off and lived for awhile after the great destruction, but since the very atmosphere was thrown off balance, the change was simply too drastic for them to survive.”

“But this is no natural disaster!” I felt shocked—like it couldn’t be as bad as the dinosaurs. “We’re doing it to ourselves! So, we maybe could stop it, right?”

“All the more heartbreaking,” said the Professor.

“Gosh,” Casey murmured with his nose pressed up against the window. “Can’t we do something? Plant more trees, or—hey—there’s America... and the Mississippi River!”

“Look, we’re heading down,” I pointed out. “Are we going to burst through in a curtain of flames, like in

the movies, Professor?”

“No,” he chuckled to himself a little, like he enjoyed telling us about his inventions. “Nothing quite so dramatic, but far more maneuverable. With no shortage of energy. So, there’s plenty of fuel for slowing down and slipping in and out of the passageways. Or tunnels, if you will.”

Then he gave us a wink—like he was sharing a secret. “They’re not exactly tunnels, though. Windows would be more like it, but that’s not really accurate, either. Windows are flat and two-dimensional. The passageways are made up of all four dimensions. And they’re stationary. You can go through the same ones over and over. If you know where they are. Some of them are quite long and complicated. Even a bit dangerous. But others are as simple as hallways.”

“Gosh!” Casey was so amazed his entire vocabulary seemed reduced to that one word. “One of the main purposes of Alpha One—outside of communications—is to search out and map the passageways. They’ve been at it for years now, and I must say they’ve made good progress.”

“But Professor, you said four dimensions,” I pointed out. “Don’t you mean three?”

“What—and leave out Einstein’s discovery? Time, Peter. Time is the other variable that eluded him for so long. And time is the fourth dimension.”

“You mean to say...” Casey turned away from the window in pure astonishment. “That there really is such a thing as... as time travel?”

“Well, they do have quite a few theories about it,” the Professor said thoughtfully. “The truth is, I’m working on a project now out at Alpha Three, that will prove—” He stopped suddenly, like he had just remembered something. “Oh, but we’re getting way ahead of ourselves.” He reached under his seat, rummaged in a briefcase for a few seconds, and took out two leather pouches that were about the size of a baseball. “It’s time for the secrets.”

It’s hard to describe how I felt at that moment. To tell you the truth, my brain was having a hard time taking it all in. Think about it! Flying saucers and dinosaur bones. Computer systems that were so advanced you only had to be “linked up” to input data. And now time travel?

Holy cow!

My brain was going into overload. I mean I wouldn’t be surprised if I woke up back in the bird loft—right now—with Jim jumping up and down on top of me, and Casey trying to shake me out of a nightmare. The kind you get from mixing too much mustard with pickles before going to bed.

“This,” said the Professor as he opened the first pouch, “is for Peter. It’s a pterodactyl egg. Which I carefully chipped away on one side to expose a perfectly formed skeleton. Quite detailed, you see?”

“That. Is so cool!” I had never seen anything like it!

“Discovered it at the Jefferson site when I was just about your age,” he went on. “One of my first projects. Many years ago.”



“But Professor...” I said as he handed it over to me, “it’s priceless! How can you give it up? How can you trust me not to –”

I stopped short. Now, I got the picture. This little skeleton was the kind of thing I had been dreaming about discovering my whole life. Ever since I could remember. I mean, it made the rest of my collection look like nothing but old dusty rocks that you had to look at real hard to tell they were even bones.

This thing was perfect! Any idiot could see it! From the tiny teeth already formed in its jaw, right down to the symmetrical shape of the bony wing that was folded against its side and would have someday been covered with leather-like sails.

This thing could make me famous. And I was supposed to keep it a secret?

The Professor looked at me like he could read my mind. Having something like this in my possession was going to be the biggest temptation of my life. And he knew it.

“It’s yours, my boy,” he said simply. “To do whatever you want with.”

Then he opened the next pouch and reached inside. “Now you, Casey Tucker, are an explorer. While Peter looks for answers, you ask questions. A different type of science, but science never-the-less.”

Casey sat on the edge of his seat as if he couldn’t wait another minute to see what was inside the bag that was meant for him. The Professor took out a piece of paper and carefully began to unfold it. “This is a map of

near space,” he began, “and near is the key word here. There are three actual passageways marked on it. Small ones, of course. But real passageways all the same. I discovered them quite by accident when I was just about your age.”

He gazed at it dreamily for a moment, as if remembering. “You see, it was hard to keep my mind on the past when the future kept winging by over my head. Airplanes were all the rage back in those days. And it seemed every young sprout wanted to grow up and be a test pilot.”

“Gosh!” Casey’s eyes were glued to the map.

“But there was something far more important to discover about flight, and—quite by accident, and at an early age—I literally stumbled onto it! It is the reason I have come so far with my inventions in so short a time.”

Then he chuckled at our expressions and added, “A little over fifty years might seem like a long time to you boys. But on the grand scale of the millenniums, it is a mere spark in the heavens!”

“Hey,” Casey muttered. “Hey, I recognize this place. Why, this is right under the old—”

“There’s treasure there, if you use it right,” the Professor told him. “And I leave it to you.”

“But—but—” Now Casey looked worried. “What should I do with it?”

“That, my boy, is entirely up to you. Both of you, actually. Because you will soon discover that the two treasures are linked together. Remember what Einstein

said...”

“It’s all relative,” we both answered at the same time. “Now there’s one last thing. The rules. Are you ready?”

We both nodded.

“Only if it’s good. And if in doubt... don’t.”

“That’s it?” I asked. “Only if what’s good?”

“And what shouldn’t we do?” Casey added.

“As I said before, gentlemen, it is entirely up to you.”

“But but what exactly is our mission?” Casey finally came right out and asked.

“Your mission,” said the Professor, “is what you do with what you’ve been given. And if you can remain noble while you accomplish it. Noble enough, that is, to become my Young Scientifics.”

*“You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## JIM DANDY TO THE RESCUE

The discussion might have gone on for hours if the Professor hadn't pointed out the window just then. We were landing! Casey and I looked out in time to see a burst of blue sky and a blur of colors before the dark shaft of the tunnel swallowed us up.

So much for my question about if anyone might see us coming in. The *Intrepid* came in so fast it wouldn't get as much notice as the flash of a camera somewhere. Sheesh. Before I knew it, we were back at the sub station and a whole army of droids was getting off.

I guess the Professor didn't need our help, after all. As far as I could see, those droids hardly needed the Professor's help. They seemed to know what to do without him having to say a single word. Instead, he walked us to the elevator, gave us each a pat on the shoulder, and said, “Good luck, boys!” before waving us off.

It was all so ordinary. Sort of like saying goodbye to your grandpa after a visit. Before we knew it we were

stepping out into the basement and hurrying our way around boxes and crates to get out of there.

It was five-thirty already.

“I’m late,” I felt a little worried about that. “Even if I didn’t have to go back for Pearl, I’d still have to think of something to tell Dad.”

“Tell him you got stuck in the bathroom.” Casey ran the flashlight along the wall where the door should have been. “I’ll go get Pearl and bring her back as fast as I can. Hey—we must have got turned around somehow. Where’s the door?”

“Try the next wall,” I suggested.

“I don’t remember all those boxes stacked up like that before... do you?”

“Well, they must have been. Nobody has been here but us. Right?”

“I guess. But... uh-oh... look at that.”

It was the door, all right. I recognized the little iron shutter for peeking through. Only there was no handle to open it from this side.

“We better go back and tell the Professor,” Casey decided quickly. “Before he leaves and we get trapped in here.”

“OK. But hurry. I’m in enough trouble already.”

We scooted back the way we came like two crabs running to catch the tide. Only we couldn’t find the elevator! There were dozens of boxes and crates stacked up against the wall where it should have been, and not even one opened up like a door. And it was five forty-five. Not only were we off limits, we were in a hidden

basement level, stuck in a room that nobody else knew about. In a building that was only one out of fourteen others.

“That’s it.” I reached into my pocket for the cell phone. “Now I have to tell Dad. There’s no other way to—oh, for gosh sakes! The thing says no signal, again!”

“Too many levels down in the middle of all this cement, I guess. Let’s look one more time for the elevator.”

After about ten or fifteen minutes of pushing and pulling on boxes, we ended up back at the door again. Still no handle on it. Not that we expected one to mysteriously appear, or anything. But the way the whole day had gone, nothing would have surprised us.

No such deal.

It was as flat as ever, and for a minute we just stood staring at it. Like maybe one would pop out of the wood if we looked hard enough.

“The batteries are getting low.” Casey gave the flashlight a shake to make sure it wasn’t just a loose connection. “I guess we better turn it off for awhile.”

“We haven’t used it that much. They should have hours left in them still.”

“Ah, Jim’s likes to play with it in the middle of the night. He never sleeps all the way through. I guess he must have used it more than I noticed.”

“I’ll say.”

Click. Total darkness. And it was getting cold. It was probably always cold down here, only we hadn’t noticed before because we were busy moving around.

Until now.

“I thought you said Jim might be able to lead somebody down here,” I reasoned. “If he’s smart enough to work for NASA, how come it’s taking him so long?”

“It’s not like he’s going to miss me or anything.” I could hear the wrapper on another granola bar being ripped off as he talked. “Aunt Bill and I always do something in the evenings. I just sleep in the bird loft, I don’t live there. She’d have to come up with the idea of asking him. Once she misses me, that is.”

“Well, my Dad’s probably missed me so much by now, I can feel the seat of my pants smoking just thinking about it.”

“Hey, my Aunt Bill’s not exactly going to be happy with me when she has to call security, you know.”

“Holy smokes, Casey! Do you realize we could get grounded for the whole summer for this?”

“I never get grounded.”

“Well, I do.”

“I usually get turned over to somebody who works my tail off for no pay.”

“That’s even worse,” I moaned.

“Yeah. The only good thing about it is, by the time I get old enough to collect a real paycheck, I’ll have a lot of experience to write down on my resume.”

“Whoop-eee.”

“Shh! What was that?” he fumbled for the flashlight.

“Somebody’s coming!”

Click. The light came on, again.

“Holy cripes!” I jumped to my feet. “It’s a rat—I hate rats!”

“Quick—climb up on a box!” He tossed his backpack onto the nearest crate and scrambled up after.

I was right behind him. “Where did he go?” I whispered.

“Over there behind that box.” He pointed the light at the nearest wall. “Let’s just keep the light on till it burns out. Maybe somebody will come by then. Maybe the Professor will come back.”

“Why should he?” I sat down on the crate and let my legs dangle over the side. “We’re on a training mission, remember? We’re supposed to be acting noble.”

“Dying of starvation isn’t noble,” he objected.

“You’ve had two granola bars and a half a bag of licorice,” I reminded him. “People can survive weeks without food.”

“Not without water, though. Hey—want to look at my map? Figure out what the connection is between bones and passageways?”

“Might as well. It will help pass the time, anyway.”

He unsnapped one of the pockets in his vest as he sat down and carefully pulled out the leather pouch. While he was unfolding the map, I felt for the bulge in my own pocket. The priceless little pterodactyl egg was still there.

“See?” Casey held the dim face of the flashlight so close he had to move it around to see the whole thing.



“The first thing I noticed right away, is that it’s all inside the museum complex.”

“Makes sense,” I replied. “He grew up around here, remember? Hanging around the Sutter expedition. It wasn’t till later—after they all disappeared—that Jefferson built the museum on top of it.”

“I wonder why he didn’t disappear? The Professor, I mean.”

It was so dark in there the flashlight was only good enough to make creepy shadows. The way Casey’s hat was all crumpled up and bent out of shape, he reminded me of Sherlock Homes when he was hot on a case. Especially the way he was squinting at that map.

“Maybe he did disappear.” I looked over his shoulder at all the strange lines and markings. “He disappeared off the space project, didn’t he? He seems to be pretty good at coming and going that way. Pterodactylus...” I read the funny lettering out loud. “That’s easy. Down there by the sub station where they first excavated all those Pterodactyl bones.”

“Yes, but look at this,” Casey pointed. “It’s inside another passageway marked Energy Field. And they all sort of line up... see?” He ran a finger diagonally across the page until it rested on the last one. Glen Heron.

Whatever that meant. The only heron I had ever heard of was a giant blue bird. All of a sudden, a cold chill ran up the back of my neck. “Hey, Case...” I looked around behind me like maybe somebody was watching us.

“What.”

“Maybe the Sutter Expedition didn’t get bumped off for fame and fortune, or anything. I mean if everything’s... uh, relative... like the Professor says, then maybe they all fell into some kind of time warp or something. You know, back to the dinosaur days. Maybe the Professor was the only one who ever found his way out.”

Casey was quiet for so long, I finally tore my eyes off the map to look over at him. He was staring at me with his mouth open. “Pete,” he whispered. Like maybe he didn’t feel so alone anymore, either. “There’s three passageways marked on here.”

“Sure. That’s what he told us, remember? And I’ll bet if we keep the stuff secret instead of blabbing it around to NASA or the National Inquirer, we’ll maybe get to fly through them in the *Intrepid* someday.”

“But—gosh, don’t you get it? This is the test. We’re supposed to figure it out for ourselves. The way he did. He didn’t have the *Intrepid* when he first discovered the passageways, did he?”

“I guess not.”

“So, they must be passable without it. Besides that he called it near space, remember? The *Intrepid* is for outer space. Going long distances and all that.”

“Man.”

“I bet our mission is to see if we can get through the passageways.” He looked over at me, and even in the dim light, I could see the excited glint in his eyes. “The time tunnels!”

“But what about the noble part?” I reminded him. “I

thought we were supposed to keep everything secret.”

“For someone like me who has wanted to be famous all their lives,” he reasoned, “I think just getting through the tunnels without tipping off a camera crew for *Sixty Minutes* would be about as noble as I could get.”

“I don’t know. It’s one thing to keep a secret hid in your drawer. But actually going through a time tunnel without asking him... what if we wrecked everything and failed the mission?”

“Pete,” he insisted. “Think about the guidelines. Would going through the tunnels be good or bad for us?” Then he answered his own question before I even got a chance. “Good. If they were bad, he wouldn’t have told us about them, right?”

“I guess.”

“Sure, I’m right.”

“What about the doubts, though? Remember if in doubt, don’t? I think maybe I’m having—”

All of a sudden, we heard voices. Far away, somewhere along the stairway. But definitely voices. And lots of them. Casey stuffed the map into the leather pouch as fast as he could and crammed it back into his vest pocket.

At the same time he hollered, “Help!” so loud it made my ears ring. “Somebody get us out of here! Help!”

Then everything happened at once.

Jim was the first one through the door. He ran up to us with a big smile, whooping and hollering, and

smelling like green watermelon gum. I guess he found my trail marker.

After that came Aunt Bill, Dad—with Pearl riding on top of his shoulders—Mr. Purdy with all of his keys jangling, and a couple of security guards. About three flashlights started darting around, along with Mr. Purdy's industrial strength model that practically lit up the whole place.

Somebody sneezed on account of all the dust that was getting kicked up by so many feet. Then I heard Pearl holler out, "Hey—what did you guys ditch me for?"

"Quiet down, Pearl," said Dad. Then he asked, "You kids all right? Pearl said you've been gone since lunch time."

"Well... we just... we..." I couldn't seem to get much out.

Aunt Bill didn't say a thing. But the way she was standing there with her hands on her hips looking at Casey, I knew we were in for it.

"There's no handle on this side of the door," Casey explained quickly. "We were so excited about finding Finkelstein—the lab, I mean—we didn't notice till we tried to get out!"

"Holy smokes!" I gasped. He just blurted out the whole story! So much for secrets. I looked down at my Alpha Band, expecting it to disappear any second...

"That's pretty lame, Case," Aunt Bill replied. "You know the rules about the lower levels. It could have taken days for us to find you without Jim."

“Who’s Finkelstein?” Dad asked.

“Can we continue this discussion in one of the offices?” Mr. Purdy suggested. “My wife’s pot roast is probably dried to beef jerky by now.”

“Everything looks fine here, Sam,” said one of the security guards. He must have done a check around the room. “Just another storeroom the kid’s been poking around in.”

“Dr. Tucker,” said the security guy in charge, “I’m going to have to insist –”

“Oh, don’t worry, Sam,” Aunt Bill answered. “I think the whole problem can be taken care of quite easily. Mr. Purdy? Do you have any room on your maintenance crew for a couple of volunteers for the summer?”

Oh, holy cow... we were going to get slave labor.

*“A man should look for what is, and not for what  
he thinks should be.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## BAD MONKEY

Dad didn't ground me, on account of he thought working part time for Mr. Purdy was a pretty good idea. I was worried he might ask about Dr. Finkelstein again, but by the time we got home, a video message alert was flashing on the computer.

It was Mom, all the way from Africa. By the time everybody got through visiting (man, was she getting a tan over there), I guess he forgot about it. Which is a good thing. My dad can see through me like I was made out of glass, and thinking up an answer without giving away secrets would have been pretty hard. Besides that, I don't think the Professor would consider making up lies a very noble way to solve problems.

Pearl wanted to work for Mr. Purdy, too. Actually, I think she was just afraid she would miss out on something. Because when Aunt Bill offered to let her help out at the zoo instead, she dropped the idea of

working in the maintenance yard like a hot potato.

So much for loyalty.

While Pearl got to spend her time monitoring habitats, feeding dolphins, counting birds and playing with monkeys, Casey and I were working our tails off. Painting the maintenance shack, mowing lawns, and keeping the whole fleet of golf carts washed and waxed. Sheesh.

We had to work from nine until one, every day. By then we were starved. We usually ended up back at the bird loft for a late lunch and couple hours of just hanging out for awhile. I still had to do a normal activity with Pearl. And that was about all we could fit in a day. There wasn't a whole lot of time for exploring, on account of we always had a kid sister or monkey tagging along. Sometimes both.

By the end of the second week it was getting pretty frustrating. We hadn't found any of the tunnels at all, much less looked in one. The map was drawn years before the museum complex was ever built, and we were having trouble just figuring out the general area where the old map started. On top of that, it was pretty impossible to follow leads when we were so busy with all our required activities.

We tried to make up games that included looking for the tunnels. But Pearl seemed to like Dad's list a lot better than any activity Casey or I could come up with. Why, in those two weeks, we had been swimming at the pool, seen two matinees at the local theater, gone roller-skating four times, and even signed Pearl up for Little

League. Then we got the bright idea of “Baker Tucker Tours.”

Bingo. It was a game Pearl never got tired of. Each day we would drive her around in one of the golf carts to a different part of the complex, where we were really exploring for passageways. We even painted a sign to hang off the golf cart that said “Baker Tucker Tours.” Casey was the tour guide on account of he came here every summer and knew more places to go. I was the driver.

I have to admit, I was getting pretty good at handling those golf carts. Of course, if ever we got off on an empty hallway or a maintenance road that the visitors weren’t allowed on, we usually let Jim drive. He enjoyed it so much, we didn’t have the heart not to. He was ten times more careful since the crash. And besides that, I think maybe he missed flying for NASA. Or whatever it was he did when he worked there.

Half the stuff Casey told us on the tours, I think he just made up. Like how a couple of the stuffed animals in the natural history building were trouble-makers from the zoo that had to be destroyed. Or how the moon rock in the space building moved a quarter of an inch all by itself every month because it was still following the cycles of the moon.

Sometimes he would get a little carried away. Like the time he said the guy who painted some of the pictures we were looking at in the art building, went crazy and cut off his own ear. Pearl was so shocked I had to tell her it was a rumor. Even then she fussed



about it for the rest of the day.

But the real whopper was the one he told about the gorillas. Pearl had a soft spot for primates on account of all the time she spent with Aunt Bill. So, the gorilla story really hit her hard. Casey said the gorillas weren't always the shy, peace-loving creatures the nature programs would have you believe. He said when they were out in nature they lived in tribes and had territories.

He said that natives who lived around them were scared of them, and usually tried to keep out of their way. That's on account of the whole tribe would come down and attack the villages with sticks and rocks, like a regular war, if they thought their territory was being invaded.

Then, to top it all off and make it sound real, he said the big old silverback gorilla in the primate habitat—the one they called Old Silver—was injured in one of those wars and rescued by game wardens. Of course, it happened a long time ago. And even though he had been in the zoo now for almost ten years, he would still go on rampages sometimes if too many strangers came snooping around his habitat. Which was why they had to lock him up for a couple weeks every time they hired on a new zoologist. It took him that long to get used to a person. Casey said he still had the wild instincts in him, because he came from the “dark continent.”

“Where's the dark continent?” Pearl wanted to know.

“The place that has the wildest animals, the worst

diseases, and took longer to get civilized than any other place on earth,” he replied. “Why, they still even have cannibals in some places over there. Which is a whole lot worse than a gorilla war.”

“But where is it?” Pearl insisted.

“Africa, of course,” said Casey.

That did it.

Pearl started bawling on account of that’s where Mom was. I had to pull the golf cart over, give her my last piece of watermelon gum, and tell her she could star in one of my *Dinosaur Planet* episodes. Sheesh. Even that wasn’t enough. I had to let her carry my camera and let her film anything she wanted for the rest of the afternoon, too.

She wanted to film Old Silver, on account of she felt sorry for him. I would have tried to talk her out of it, except Casey sided with her. Because he made her cry in the first place. Oh, well. I figured I might at least get those shots of rainforest habitat I’d been wanting for my show ever since we came here.

The primate habitats were up against some strange looking rock formations at the farthest end of the zoo. Which was the very last section of the whole complex, so it took us almost twenty minutes to get there. Even in the golf cart. Sometimes, that golf cart was slower than walking, on account of you had to pull over and wait if too many tourists got in your way.

It was a hot day, and a couple hundred people were gathering around the marine habitats to see the dolphin show. We decided it would be easier to walk. So, we

parked behind a refreshment stand where one of the workers promised to keep an eye on our cart. Then he asked if we wanted a free ice cream. I said, sure, and ordered four Brazil nut cones.

“Brazil nut,” Pearl complained, “I hate nuts. I want chocolate chip!”

“Listen, Pearl,” I told her. “If you want to be a zoologist someday like Aunt Bill, maybe study mountain gorillas or something, then you better start doing your part to save the rain forests. Otherwise there won’t be any gorillas left for you to study.”

“Yeah, that’s where they live,” added Casey. “In rain forests.”

“So, what do I have to eat nuts for?” she asked.

“Because,” I explained, “I read on the back of my ‘Save the Rainforest’ club card that Brazil nuts come from the rainforest. And if enough people buy them, they will get more valuable than wood, and the people that are cutting down all the trees will start picking nuts off them instead. Then they’ll make more money.”

“So,” said Pearl.

“So, you’ll be helping to save the rainforest,” said Casey. “Which will help save the gorillas, so maybe there will be some left when you get old enough to go there. You want to go there, don’t you?”

“If it’s like the primate habitat, I do,” she admitted.

“It’s a jillion times better than the primate habitat,” he told her. “Besides that, it only takes two weeks to get used to something. If you eat a Brazil nut cone every day for two weeks, you’ll start liking it.”

“Ah, how do you know?” she asked.

“Because I didn’t like nuts, either,” he answered.  
“And now, I do.”

There were only a few tourists wandering through the primate exhibits when we got there. But Old Silver wasn’t anywhere to be seen. He hardly ever went into the observation area because he didn’t like to be stared at. I guess in primate society, it’s considered rude. At least, that’s what Aunt Bill told us, who happened to be there answering questions that day for anybody who was interested.

“About the only time you would be able to catch a glimpse of Old Silver,” said Aunt Bill, “is if you wait until feeding time, right Pearl?”

“Sure,” Pearl answered. “I’ve seen him lots of times. But I never got to film him. Never had a video camera before.” She held it up for inspection. “But I’ve got one, now.”

“Turning into a naturalist, already,” smiled Aunt Bill. She sure was pretty when she smiled. “Capturing your favorite subjects on film. I used to do that, too, when I was your age. Didn’t have this cool of a camera though.”

Anything Aunt Bill did, Pearl wanted to do. Heck, she had even started wearing her hair the same way. Tied back with a scarf was a lot easier than braids, anyway.

“You made your own movies at my age?” Pearl asked.

“I sure did. Only there weren’t a lot of monkeys and

gorillas roaming around the farm I grew up on, so my subjects were mostly bugs and reptiles.”

“I love bugs, too!”

“You ought to see some of her old movies,” Casey teased.

“Not that old.” Aunt Bill pulled his hat-brim down over his eyes. “You make me sound ancient.”

“Hey –” He shoved it up, again.

About that time, a group of tourists came over to talk, so we had to leave.

“How come everybody calls her Doctor Tucker?” Pearl asked, watching Aunt Bill step up to the information counter. “Is it because she takes care of sick monkeys?”

“You know not every kind of a doctor takes care of sick stuff, Pearl,” I said, as we headed out a back door that lead to the staff area. “People call Mom and Dad Doctor Baker, don’t they? Both of them. And they don’t work in hospitals or anything, either.”

“They work with bones, though,” she reminded me. “It’s the same thing.”

It wasn’t really. But sometimes it was a waste of time trying to explain something to Pearl she already had her own concept about. It had taken me years to figure out how to reason with her own particular way of thinking. Usually it was easier just to drop the subject.

We walked through the offices, past storerooms and staff observation areas. “Remember that place?” Casey asked as we passed the two way window that let you view the sleeping area.

“Yeah, but there’s never anybody in it,” complained Pearl.

“Most of them would rather be outside during the day,” he explained. “But wait till you see this.”

The next door we went through had a great big push button handle that opened up into a huge walk-in refrigerator. There were big barrels of fresh fruit and vegetables stacked up everywhere.

“This is where the staff gets their food ready,” Casey said. “And you have to walk right through it to get to the maintenance gate outside, where we can see all the way up the hill.”

“I’ve been here lots of times,” said Pearl.

“If we peek through the maintenance gate,” he went on, “we might be able to catch a glimpse of him up there. It’s sort of his private place.” Then he whispered, “his territory,” to remind us how dangerous it was.

The gate was below ground level. It was on the opposite side of the tourist observation area, with the big hill in between. You couldn’t even see the walkway the tourists used to get from one habitat to the other from here. Since it was the last exhibit, they had to go back the way they came.

A cement pathway ran along the habitat boundary fence, all the way to the gate that was pretty close to the bottom of the hill, or, Old Silver’s mountain, as it was called. Past the gate, it just looked like a regular old hill sloping up, overgrown with bushes and one or two trees.

There was no sign of a gorilla anywhere.

“There’s lots of places for him to hide up there.” Casey peeked through the bars of the gate and looked up at the hill.

“I’m gonna stay right here till I see him,” Pearl announced. “Even if it takes all night.”

“Not past five-thirty, you won’t,” I looked at my watch. It was ten after three.

“Oh, no!” Casey was staring down at his arm. “Pete —Pete!”

Then he got totally upset. I mean, he went ballistic in about three seconds flat. He grabbed my sleeve and pulled me around the corner so Pearl wouldn’t hear.

“My Alpha Band!” He was desperate. “It’s gone!”

“Gone!” An awful feeling come over me. If Casey’s was gone, I was sure mine wasn’t going to be far behind. “Are you sure you didn’t —”

“I never take it off!” he moaned. “I had it at the refreshment stand, and now it’s gone!”

Had we failed our training mission?

Two weeks had gone by and we hadn’t found even one tunnel, much less all three. We hadn’t found anything that looked like one, either. Not even close. We hadn’t told our secrets to anybody, but we sure hadn’t made much progress. Then a terrible thought came to me. Maybe we didn’t have what it took to be Young Scientifics.

Maybe we didn’t even have enough brains to be “Official Cadets” of the Young Scientific program. Considering how brave Casey was, and how it was mostly him that went first all the time, I sure couldn’t

imagine making it into the program if he didn't. Besides that, we were a team, now—Casey and me. Nothing would be the same without him. Even being famous.

“Case,” I decided right then and there, “if you can't go, then I'm not going, either.”

“But Pete, you got to! One of us has to make it — somebody has to help Finkelstein with the future! Otherwise we might —”

About that time, Jim started screeching and hollering, and making wild signs at Casey with his hands as he ran up to us. “What's wrong with him?” I asked.

“Bad monkey... bad monkey...” Casey read out loud the signs he kept making, over and over. “He must have done something wrong. He always tells on himself when—hey!”

Casey gasped like he got shot and then grabbed Jim's wrist. “My Alpha Band! Here it is! He must have stole it off my wrist when I was holding his hand through that crowd! I'll say you're a bad monkey, Jim!”

Then he started laughing out of pure relief. I did, too, on account of I was pretty relieved, myself. Only Jim was still upset. He kept pulling at Casey's arm and making “bad monkey” signs over and over, again.

“That' s OK, Jim.” Casey buckled his Alpha Band back on his wrist. “I forgive you this time. Only, don't do it again, see? Because this is not a toy. It's very, very, important, and —”

Jim started making different signs, and all of a sudden Casey's mouth dropped open.



*Cousin Summers*

“What?” I asked. “Now, what did he say?”

“Pearl!” he gasped. “She went through the gate! Bad monkey—oh, my gosh, Pete—he means, Old Silver!”

*“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## INTO THE PASSAGEWAY

For once I didn't even think about being first. All I knew was I had to get Pearl out of there before that gorilla noticed her, and I charged through the gate like it was the starting line at the races.

But as fast as I was going, Jim passed me up like it was nothing--boy, could he move out! He went through all those rocks and bushes on the side of the hill like they weren't even there. I guess once he had our attention, he figured to rescue Pearl all by himself.

I didn't dare yell out for her to stop. If Old Silver was around anywhere close, it could be the end of all of us. I could see her just starting to climb up through the underbrush on the base of the mountain when Jim got in front of her and blocked the way. He kept doing that bad monkey sign over and over again, but Pearl didn't get it.

About that time I caught up with them. I reached out

and took hold of Pearl's belt loops-- like usual--but she had been so busy looking at Jim, she hadn't noticed me, and it scared her silly. She let loose with one of her earsplitting screams, but I put a hand over her mouth and stifled it about two seconds out.

"Shh--it's just me!" I whispered, "and this is the last time I'm ever going to let you--"

All of a sudden the biggest, scariest looking gorilla I ever saw, stood up from behind a clump of bushes a few feet away. For a few seconds he looked surprised, and then he was outraged. Totally. He might have charged us if Casey hadn't popped up from another direction just then and hollered, "Hey, batter-batter-batter!" to get his attention.

Old Silver turned around to see where that noise was coming from... and then took out after Casey! You can't outrun a gorilla. I guess that's why people say the best thing is to stand your ground, because most of the time they're just faking.

Well, that was the best fake I ever saw.

Everything happened so fast after that, I couldn't believe my eyes. Before the gorilla got to Casey, Jim took off, screaming and hollering, and jumped right in the way. Old Silver let out a monster roar and charged the monkey instead. There were shrieks and roars--leaves and branches flying every which way as the two of them tumbled and rolled down the hill.

Then all of a sudden I heard a voice--right inside my head, saying, "Go to the top of the hill, Peter--the top of the hill!" Before I knew it, I was dragging and

hauling Pearl up there. Casey must have got the same idea because we all got there at once. I mean, instantly.

The next thing I knew, we were all staring into the dark opening of a giant cave. If you could call it that. It looked more like the whole top of the hill had been blasted away with dynamite or something. We didn't stop to figure it out, we just needed someplace to hide. We didn't think about there might be other gorillas in there, either. We didn't think about anything but getting away from the fight going on down the hill.

All three of us threw ourselves into that dark hole like we were sliding into home with the bases loaded. Only we never hit the plate. Before we knew it, we were falling straight out into the mid-air. It was like plummeting through space. I could feel myself tumbling head-over-heels, and I still had a hold on Pearl's belt loops.

All of us were hollering our heads off, and the echoes sounded like we were moving down some giant tube. Only we never hit bottom. A big current of wind came rushing up under us and the next thing we knew, we were in slow motion. Weightless. Bobbing and floating from one side of the tunnel to the other, just like the astronauts you see on TV.

"What the heck..." Casey's voice floated by, but it was too dark to see his body.

"I'm upside down!" Pearl was so surprised she stopped yelling.

"It's OK, I got you," I tried to sound sure of myself. Only I wasn't sure where myself was.

After a few minutes our eyes started to adjust, and we could see each other's shadows floating by. That's what we looked like. Shadows. My free hand brushed up against something hairy and I yelped.

"Holy cow!" I pulled my hand back like something bit it. "I think there's a gorilla in here!"

There was something familiar about the "Oooo-ooo-ooo," we heard then, and Casey suddenly yelled, "Jim! Oh, Jim—I thought you were killed!"

"But that—that's impossible!" I tried to focus my eyes better to make sure it was really him. "How in the world did he get here? I saw him fall down the hill with Old Silver, and —"

I could see Jim's arms waving, trying to sign. Yep, it was Jim, all right.

"Up?" Casey sounded amazed. "He keeps saying he fell up."

"That's strange," I muttered. "Unless... hey--maybe we had help!" I didn't want to say from Alpha One in front of Pearl, but I figured Casey would know what I meant.

"The only help I got was from Jim," Casey answered, "and you telling me to run up the hill. What kind of bright idea was that? We should have skipped out down the hill. Now, look what happened!"

"I never said run up the hill, Case. Don't you get it?" I pointed to my head a few times. "It came from in here."

"Everybody was hollering," Pearl told us, "and Peter made me drop the camera! Hey—I'm right side

up now... wheel!”

“Stop that, Pearl!” I tried to keep hold of her belt loops while she turned a few somersaults that spiraled me right along with her.

“But it’s fun.” Now, her ponytail was floating above her head like a halo. “This is no time for games. We got to figure out how to get out of here.”

“We could play in here till four-thirty,” she suggested. “It’s better than the pool. Then we could sneak out when the gorillas go to dinner.”

“In the meantime,” Casey said, “if any gorillas sneak out that gate we left open, my Aunt Bill will ship me back to New York on the next flight. She won’t even let me work it off.”

“Holy smokes!” A terrible thought dawned on me. “What if Old Silver gets out? What if he kills one of the tourists, or something!”

“The only place he could get loose in, is the staff area,” Casey said as he sort of dog paddled over to the side of the tunnel. “And he wouldn’t go any farther than the walk-in refrigerator. That’s why they put it there. Those gorillas might have enough curiosity to slip past the maintenance gate, but there’s no way they would pass up all that food.”

“Pretty smart,” I answered.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t help us any.” He began to climb slowly back up the wall again. “They’re still going to know someone left the gate open. How did you get that gate open anyway, Pearl? It’s a combination lock. Only the staff workers know the code. I’m not

even allowed to look when they open it.”

“I didn’t open it.” She turned another somersault and me right along with her. “Jim did.”

“Jim? How could he?”

“He watched Aunt Bill do it plenty of times, I guess,” she reasoned. “When I said I wish I could get in... he just did it.”

“And you—you walked right in?” I couldn’t believe it. “After all the stories Casey told us about how mean Old Silver is?”

“Casey exaggerates.” She used one of Mom’s favorite words. “I know Old Silver’s not mean because yesterday, he gave me one of the bananas out of his dinner tub. Aunt Bill said he never did that before. Not even for his favorite people. So, he likes me. Just like Jim does.”

She turned another somersault when she said the last part and I felt myself spinning as I answered, “Sheesh, Pearl, will you quit that? You got us in big trouble here, and we’re in enough trouble of our own already!”

“I found a way out!” Casey called down to us. He was about ten feet over our heads, looking into some sort of hole in the tunnel wall.

“I’m not ready to get out, yet,” complained Pearl. “This is too much fun.”

“Come on, Pearl,” I headed toward Casey with a half dog paddle on account of I was still holding onto her. “Swim!”

When we got there, Casey wasn’t climbing into the

hole, just staring at it.

“What are you waiting for?” I asked? “Think it might be a gorilla hideout, or something?”

“No,” he answered. “I think maybe it might be one of the tunnels we’re looking for. Or something.”

“What makes you think so?”

“According to the map,” he reasoned, “the first one is marked Energy Field, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, what would you call what we just fell into?”

“Not energy. We were totally weightless. There’s nothing there but... nothing.”

“If it was nothing,” he said, “we’d have fallen right through. Think about the Polarity Theory.”

He was right. The Polarity Theory operated out of a different kind of energy. The force of gravity and the lack of it. Not having any here in this one spot almost proved it.

“Holy cow!” I whispered. “I bet he discovered this place when he was a kid, and that’s what started him thinking about polarity.”

“Who did?” asked Pearl.

“So, this could be the second one,” said Casey. “The one he called Pterodactylus.”

“Pterodactyl is a flying dinosaur,” announced Pearl.

“Hey, how’d she know that?” Casey sounded sort of suspicious. Like maybe I had been telling secrets.

“Our parents are dinosaur hunters, remember?” Then I explained, “If it’s anything about dinosaurs, Pearl knows it.”



“Oh.”

“You know what I think?” I asked. “I think that hole we just fell through was the same one we came out of in the... well, you know. And I’ll bet this one here is a...” I wanted to say time tunnel, but not in front of Pearl. So, I just said, “Um... passageway. Why else would it be called Pterodactylus? Either that or it ends up at the old excavation site with all the bones. In Finkelstein’s substation. Whatever’s left of it, anyway.”

“Pete—that’s it! You figured it out!”

“Just makes sense,” I felt kind of embarrassed on account of he sounded so amazed. We climbed up on the edge then, and I had to use both hands to haul Pearl up. All of a sudden she felt like she weighed a ton.

“Ooo, I ‘m soooo heavy.” She tried to stand up and then sat back down, again. “I feel like a sack of garbage with the bottom ripped out.”

“I wish I had my flashlight.” Casey took a few steps down the dark passageway. “It’s awful dark down—”

All of a sudden I felt a rush of fur brush past me, and I knew Jim had darted by. I guess he even had Casey beat when it came to going first. It didn’t seem to matter to him that it was dark down there. Whoosh! And he was gone. Just like that.

“Jim!” Casey hollered after him. “Wait up--Jim!”

For a minute, we all just stood there. Except Pearl, who was still sitting down. Then Casey took a deep breath and started in.

“Maybe we should wait here for him to come back,” I suggested.

“Are you kidding? If I lose something as valuable as Jim,” his voice was getting farther and farther away as he talked, “Aunt Bill won’t only send me home—she won’t ever let me come back, again. Jee-um! You wait for us—hear me? Jim!”

Then Casey was gone, and Pearl and I were the only ones left on the ledge. “Come on, Pearl,” I pulled her up. “We better stay together.”

“But I can’t see anything, Petie.”

Petie. Uh-oh, she was getting scared. “Just hold onto my hand,” I told her in my best big brother tone. “I’ll go first so you don’t bump into anything. You want to get out of here, don’t you?”

“Yep.”

“Well, this is the way out.”

I held my other hand stretched out in front of me, feeling along the rocky wall as we walked. It was a passageway, all right. A little winding one that was hardly big enough for us kids to get through. Some places we could feel both sides of the tunnel walls at the same time. It was that narrow.

It seemed like we shuffled along that way for ages. Just when I was wondering if it would stop at a dead end and we would have to go all the way back again, there was a big flash of light up ahead. Like the flash of some giant camera.

All of a sudden I heard Jim and Casey, both hollering like crazy before their voices faded away.

They were falling!

I stopped short but it was too late. There was

*Cousin Summers*

another bright flash, and—before I could do anything—the ground gave way under our feet. The next thing I knew, Pearl and I were tumbling down right after Jim and Casey.

Down... and down... and down...

*“There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; or you can live as if everything is a miracle.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## PETER BAKER’S BONES

I fell against something so hard it knocked the wind out of me. For a minute it seemed like the whole ground was swaying, and I heard the others moving around before I could even catch my breath and open my eyes, again.

It looked like we had landed on a giant pile of broken twigs and branches. Jim started jumping up and down as he looked over the edge of the pile. He was all excited about something. Not a scared kind of excited. More like the sounds he made when he first busted loose into his play yard every afternoon.

“What do you see?” Pearl pulled herself up on her hands and knees to crawl up next to him. She had her red ball cap on cockeyed, and there were leaves and twigs stuck to the ends of her ponytail.

“Owww.” Casey sat up rubbing his head and looked back to see a round rock where he had landed.

There were about six or seven of them scattered all around us. All the same size. The way my side was aching, I figured I must have landed on one, too. I reached for the sore spot and grabbed my bulged out pocket instead.

So, that was it. I had fallen on the leather pouch with my pterodactyl egg inside it. I was so worried I might have busted it--not to mention my ribs--that I pulled the pouch out of my pocket to look, totally forgetting to keep it secret from Pearl.

“That does it.” Casey pulled his leather pouch out, too. “We nearly got ourselves killed that time. I got to figure out where we are! You’ll just have to come up with some way to keep Pearl quiet about all this.”

“I’ve never been able to keep her quiet in my life,” I looked my pterodactyl bones over. They were in better shape than I was.

“Quiet about what?” asked Pearl, still looking over the side. “Hey, we’re really really high up! Look at this, Petie, we’re in the top of some trees!”

Jim came over and shook Casey by the shoulder, making signs and trying to get his attention. I wished I were faster at learning to sign. About the time I thought I knew a lot, he came up with something totally new and I had no idea what it was.

Casey had known Jim for three years. That’s how come he was so good at it. But I still admired the way he always seemed to know what Jim was trying to say. Only right now, he was so into trying to figure out his map, he wasn’t paying much attention.

“What’s he saying, Case?” I had to interrupt. The way that monkey had saved our tails so many times already, I figured anything he said was worth listening to.

Casey gave a frustrated sigh and looked up at him. “Eggs,” he interpreted. “He keeps saying eggs, so he must be hungry. What else is new?” Then he made a sign back at Jim, and talked out loud while he did it. “Later. We’ll eat later.”

He tried to get back to staring at his map, but Jim shook his shoulder, again.

“Eggs. Go home,” Casey read as Jim signed. “Eggs. Go home. I am trying to get us home, Jim. But I have to look at the—oh, my gosh! Eggs, Pete—Eggs! We’re sitting in a giant —”

“Holy macaroni, Pete!” Pearl yelled. “There’s a real live brontosaur down there! Jefferson City has the absolute best zoo in the world!”

“What?” I scrambled over to look for myself.

“I hope she’s wrong,” Casey stuffed the map back into his pocket before he got up to join us.

“She’s never wrong about dinosaurs.” I poked my head up over the side next to Pearl. “Holy cow, Case! It is a brontosaur!”

“What’s it doing?” He peeked his head up for a second and then ducked down again. Like it was too scary to look at. “Oh, my gosh almighty – it’s big!”

“They’re the friendly kind,” Pearl informed him.

“So are whales,” he answered, “but I wouldn’t want to get too close to one.”

“We are in a time tunnel!” I couldn’t take my eyes off the creature. It was pretty far away, munching a mouthful of leaves and standing on the farthest side of a big steaming lake that looked sort of familiar. “We came through a kind of time warp or something.”

“He looks a lot bigger with skin on,” Pearl observed.

I looked over in time to see her start filming. “Hey, I thought you dropped that.” Now, I’d have to think of some way to wreck the film. Pearl was acting like we were on vacation. Sheesh. Did she think she could just go up to Dad some night and say, “Look at this great footage I shot last week of a brontosaur?” I needed to have a serious talk with her.

“Jim had it.” She was all excited and kept right on filming. “This is better than getting Old Silver!”

“Pearl,” I began, “there’s something I—”

“We got to figure out how to get down from here and back up the mountain, again,” Casey said all of a sudden. “Because according to the map—”

“Hey—” Pearl put the camera strap over her head so she could carry it around her neck like a tourist. “This rock by my foot just moved... all by itself.”

She picked it up to get a better look, and while it was in her hands, it made a loud *Crack!* “Uh-oh—I busted it.”

“Put it down, Pearl!” I snatched it away from her and dropped it just as an ugly green head popped through. All slimy, with beady yellow eyes. It had a long beak that kept snapping open and closed with

about a jillion razor sharp teeth inside.

It was a real live baby pterodactyl! Man—it looked worse with its skin on, in my opinion. I realized then that my own pterodactyl egg could have come from this very nest, on account of they were about the same size. Only mine had half the shell missing. And mine was all folded up inside instead of snapping and hissing like this one was.

Pearl screamed—and so did Jim. I guess his hour of bravery was past, because he darted over the side of the giant nest like that thing was coming after him. Gone. Totally. I mean, he was out of there.

“Look out! It’s trying to bite!” Casey yelled.

“Follow Jim!” I boosted Pearl up onto the edge of the nest and then hopped up myself. Jim’s brain might have been the smallest, compared to ours, but it seemed like the only one working right then.

We scrambled down onto the nearest branch. It was about twenty feet above the ground, and a lot scarier than sitting in a big nest with sides on it. With nothing but the mid-air and a few more branches under us, Pearl took one look down and froze. I didn’t know what to do.

I couldn’t get down myself without hanging on, and I sure couldn’t carry Pearl at the same time. “Come on, Pearl, you have to be brave,” I tried to talk her into it before some giant mother pterodactyl came flying back and caught us there.

“Call Daddy, Pete!” she said. Her lip was quivering and I knew any minute she’d start bawling. Then we



would really have a problem.

“Hey, I have an idea,” Casey said. “Did you ever see that old Tarzan movie—the one where he gets shot and the monkeys carry him up into the trees and save him?”

“Where’s the phone!” Pearl wailed. She was on one track now, and all she could think of was Dad. I didn’t even reach for it, this time, on account of I knew if the signal wouldn’t come through three floors of cement, it sure as heck wasn’t going to get through a bajillion years.

“Monkeys are strong, Pearl,” Casey told her. “Sure footed, too. Why, they’re just as safe in trees as donkeys are on mountains. Right, Pete?”

“Sure,” I said. Only I wasn’t sure what he was getting at.

Then he hollered down below, “Yo! Jim Dandy!”

Jim was on the ground already, sitting against the tree trunk with both hands over his eyes. He peeked up at us through his fingers when Casey called him.

“Help Pearl down,” Casey signed the words as he said them to make sure Jim understood. “She’s scared!”

“I don’t know...” I could feel butterflies in my stomach as he scampered back up to us again, like it was nothing. I’d never trusted my sister to a monkey before. Even if he did wear shorts and a pocket vest, and used to work for NASA.

“You got any better ideas?” Casey reasoned. “We don’t have a whole lot of time before somebody comes back to check on their eggs.”

I got the picture.

“Can you do it, Pearl?” I asked. “Just hang onto Jim. He’ll get you down safe.”

“OK,” she sniffed. Total trust. Sheesh.

I couldn’t believe it. She grabbed hold round his neck and he scampered back down like she was a feather. Her extra weight didn’t seem to make any difference at all. It took Casey and me ten minutes to climb down, and we had to be careful every step of the way.

It was a lot hotter on the forest floor because the plants and bushes were crowded so close around, you couldn’t get any fresh air. We couldn’t see the lake anymore, either. But we knew about where it was because of all the steam that rose up off the surface of it.

We walked single file. Casey in front, Pearl and Jim in the middle, and me bringing up the rear. We had to push our way through giant ferns and vines so thick you could hardly see the tree trunks they were wrapped around.

“If I hadn’t been so scared,” Casey said, “I could have got my bearings before we jumped out of that nest. Now we’ll never be able to see the mountain through all these trees.”

“Are there any bugs or snakes around here?” Pearl asked. “I don’t want to step on any.”

“Don’t worry,” I answered. “If there are, you can bet they’ll probably be too big to step on.”

“I’m thirsty,” she said then. “Let’s find a

refreshment stand.”

Pearl didn't get it. I mean, I think she still thought we were taking in a new attraction at the zoo. Sort of a true-life Jurassic Park, or something. Under the circumstances, I didn't even try to explain. “We'll get something later,” I told her.

Jim started signing again, and this time the words were simple enough for even me to figure out. “Water, there.” He pointed off to the left. “Water, there. Water, there.” He sure liked to repeat himself.

“Hey, Casey!” I called ahead. “Jim says there's water close by somewhere. Of f to the left, I think. Pearl's thirsty.”

“I'd rather have lemonade,” she complained. “Mom says most of the water from drinking fountains is contaminated. It has to say filtered, or you shouldn't drink it.”

“The word is contaminated—not contaminated,” I said. “And don't worry. It's probably the purest water we'll ever taste in our life.”

“But is it filtered?”

“You bet.”

Casey was stopped ahead of us, looking at his map, again. “To the left? That's all right then—we'd still be headed for the mountain, I think. To the right is the lake, and we don't want to go there.”

He gave me a look over the top of Pearl's head, and I knew just what he meant. We didn't want to run into that brontosaur. Or any other dinosaurs, for that matter. And I totally agreed with him.

You might be wondering how I could spend most of my life collecting dinosaur bones and then not want to see a live one up close very much. Well, I'll tell you. They're big and scary, that's why. And this wasn't the movies, where you could get up and walk out if you didn't like it. Let me put it another way. I'm pretty fascinated with sharks, too, and I could spend hours at the aquarium just watching them. But I sure wouldn't jump into the tank with one just to get a closer look.

I like science but I'm not stupid.

We went left.

Animals might have smaller brains than we do, but their noses and feet work a lot better. Jim could not only climb trees and run faster than we could, he could smell water when he was a mile away from it. And he didn't just lead us to the water, he led us to the mountain. Because that's where the water was. In a giant waterfall pouring down out of the top of the mountain, into a big crystal clear pool at the bottom of it.

I was pretty thirsty, myself, so I knelt down on the nearest bank to dip some up with my hand. Besides that, I figured if I drank first, Pearl would. Even if there were no signs around anywhere that said filtered.

"Yikes!" I snatched my hand back again. It was hot as a bathtub!

"I told you it was contaminated," said Pearl.

"It isn't," I told her. "It's just warm and I wasn't expecting it. It's some kind of natural hot springs, or something."

"Hey, I'm gonna stick my feet in it!" She sat down

and tugged at her shoes.

Casey was sitting on the bank a few feet away, pouring over his map again. "I don't get it," he muttered. "It's a mountain, all right, only it doesn't look like Old Silver's. But it has to be! It was the only one around, right?"

I sat down next to him and looked over his shoulder. "Hey," I pointed out, "That's the same shape hill we were looking for in the first place. You know. When we were trying to find the first tunnel last week. Remember? We tried that little hill out behind the space building. And then those Japanese rock gardens in the horticultural park. That's it. That's the right shape."

"It's not the first passageway, though," he said as he looked up at it. "It's the third."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Maybe the Professor wrote it backwards in case the wrong person got hold of his map," I reasoned. "You know. Like LeonardodaVinci, writing all his notes in reverse on account of they thought most scientists were wizards or witches back in those days."

"Wheeeeeee!" squealed Pearl, kicking her feet until the water churned. I'd give her five minutes and she'd be wet from head to toe. "It's like a tea kettle boiling right out the top!"

"Boiling out the top," muttered Casey, staring at the top of the hill like it might explain itself to him. "Boiling right out the...Hey!"

"What?" I looked up where he was pointing but I didn't get the drift.

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

“Picture it,” Casey said. “Picture it with the top blown off! Remember the movie? That’s the same hill! Only it just hasn’t blown up, yet. See?”

I saw. With half the top blown away, it would look exactly like the hill in the primate habitat everybody called Old Silver’s Mountain. It all started to make sense. But it was the scariest sense I had ever had to think about...

Because it proved we had really gone back in time.

*“The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”*

*Albert Einstein*

## NO ESCAPE

I stared up at the torrents of white water tumbling down the rocky hillside. “So, where’s the third tunnel?”

“According to the map,” Casey replied, “it’s in the middle of that mountain somewhere.” “Middle high, or middle in?”

“Middle in. All three of the passageways are in the mountain. Hey, I wonder if they’re all connected, somehow, and these are just different doors.”

“I hope so. Because we sure can’t go back the way we came.”

“If we found the no gravity place, again, we maybe could swim up.”

“Worth a try. Or we could take some time to look for a cave into the mountain. But, man, you never know what might be in it. If you know what I mean.” I looked over at Pearl to make sure she hadn’t heard that. She hadn’t. She was still playing in the water. “How far do

you figure the third one is from here? According to the map.”

“Well...” He turned the paper to look at it from all angles. “It’s called *Glen Heron*. And so, far, each name describes the place in some way. Far as I know, a Heron’s a big old bird, though. Nothing that would live inside a mountain. See how far in it is?” He pointed a finger along the faded line of a sketch.

“Holy cow!” I looked closer. “That’s a picture of this waterfall. See?”

“Sure, but what’s that got to do with anything? All three are in the mountain.”

“The tunnel could be behind the waterfall, couldn’t it? And maybe they aren’t live birds. It might be another excavation site. Like the wall under the basement next to the lab.”

“OK, it’s worth a try. Have to get wet, though. Doesn’t look like there’s any way over there except across this water.”

If I thought getting Pearl down out of a thirty-foot tree was hard, getting her to swim through a waterfall might be impossible. She hated to put her head underwater. And no matter how many times Dad tried to show her how to swim, she still dog paddled all over the pool with her head sticking up high and dry.

“Yep. Looks like we’ll have to swim it.” Casey started folding his map up, again. “But I don’t know how we’ll get Jim in. He hates the water.”

“He’d hate getting left behind a lot worse,” I reasoned. “I bet if we go first, he’ll come.”



“I hope so, because we sure can’t—what was that?” He started looking all around us like maybe the boogeyman was going to jump out any minute. “There it is again...feel it?”

The ground was starting to shake under us. Not like an earthquake or anything, but sort of off and on again... like a train coming. *Boom... b-boom... boom... b-boom...* The thought of a dinosaur coming through the trees hit us both at the same time and we were on our feet like two heads popping out of a jack-in-the-box.

“Let’s get out of here!” Casey stuck the map into a waterproof pocket on his vest. He had to take out two granola bars to make room, but he just tossed them over his shoulder like they were nothing.

This was serious.

“We’re going for a swim, Pearl.” I tried to sound like it was all part of the tour.

“I didn’t bring my suit,” she complained. “And I can’t get the camera wet!”

“Give it to me.” I took my pterodactyl egg out of my own waterproof pocket to slip the camera in there instead. That’s when I noticed the egg had changed colors. Uh-oh. What if that thing came alive right inside my pocket? I wasn’t ready to give it up, though. Not unless I absolutely had to. I zipped it into another pocket that was made out of net you could see through. Wouldn’t hurt a petrified egg to get wet. If it was still petrified.

“Come on!” I pulled her up by the arm. “We won’t even have to get used to the water, on account of it’s so

warm.”

“Hey—my shoes!”

“Pearl, there’s no time for —”

*Boom! B-boom!* Now the ground was shaking so hard she noticed. It was too late to take chances. I dragged her right into the water with me. I figured to wade just up to my knees, at first, only it dropped straight down off the bank. Two steps out and we were in deep water.

Before I knew it, we went under. Hardly had time to catch my breath. When I splashed up to the surface again and looked for Pearl, the only sign of her was her red ball-cap floating all by itself a few feet away.

“Pearl!” I looked everywhere. “Pearl!”

She popped up like a cork right in front of me. Her ponytail was plastered down over her forehead and she was dog paddling in circles about fifty miles an hour, choking and yelling at the same time. “Peter—you dumb! You pushed me under!”

All of a sudden there was a roar like a monster movie, and this huge tyrannosaur came crashing through the trees. The meat-eating dangerous kind with scary looking teeth. Holy cow—no wonder their name meant “terrible lizard.” He was walking on his hind legs, thrashing his giant tail from side to side, and he was headed right for us!

Casey was at the edge of the bank trying to pull Jim in, but the monkey was about ten times stronger than him and wouldn’t budge. When the tyrannosaur came busting through, Casey let go and took a flying leap into

the water. Jim high-tailed it off into the trees.

The tyrannosaur came right up to the edge of the bank and gave another loud roar. For a minute I thought he was going to jump in after us, but then the whole sky turned dark—like a cloud passing over—and he looked up instead.

All at once the air was filled with the awfulest screeches and shrieks you ever heard, and a whole flock of pterodactyls came down circling, snapping and tearing at the dinosaur like dive bombers! While he was ducking and stumbling along the bank trying to shake them off, the three of us were swimming for our lives. We headed straight for the waterfall, and I didn't have to tell Pearl to keep up. She practically beat us there.

"Quick!" Casey panted. "Swim right through! Get in where we can hide!"

Then he disappeared into the shower of foam and bubbles, and Pearl followed right behind. I guess the way to overcome one fear, is to set it next to something worse. It's amazing what a person can do if they really have to.

I kicked through last, thinking to meet them on the other side where we would have to wait who knows how long until it was safe to come out, again. Only they weren't there. On the other side was a huge cave that had a strange sort of glow coming out of it.

"Hey—where are you guys?" I stopped to tread water while I tried to see inside. But before my eyes could adjust, I felt myself being grabbed by a strong current and pulled in anyway.

“Over here!” called Casey. “Looking for something to climb onto. Gosh, I can’t get over to the side! Current’s too strong!”

“Diamonds!” Pearl paddled toward a cluster of glowing crystals up ahead that practically lit up the whole area of rock wall behind them.

“Wait for me, Pearl!” I tried to catch up with her. “And don’t touch anything!”

“I can’t. I’m floating down a river all by myself, Petie... see? Wheeee! I don’t even have to paddle!”

One minute she was doing her dog paddle thing, and the next she went slipping away like a leaf swirled in a stream. Out and around an arm of glowing crystals, then swept off into some faster channel beyond.

“Pearl! Pearl!” I hollered. But her last words faded away like the end of a song.

I felt myself being grabbed, too, but I didn’t fight it. I was too worried about catching up with her, so I just kept right on swimming. Surged ahead so fast with the added help of the current, I felt like I was super human, or something.

*Zoom!* Past more sparkling crystals and tall, thin waterfalls that were glowing so bright they seemed fluorescent. Some of them came from high up in the ceiling and others bubbled out of the rocks, tumbling and cascading into purplish pools that overflowed and poured down into the river. The color of them reminded me of something. It looked just like the glowing stuff bubbling through the tubes in Finkelstein’s lab. It was all over the place!

*Cousin Summers*

Pretty soon there was so much light and sparkle swirling together from that stuff, I couldn't tell the difference between the walls and the water. The current pulled even stronger as the river ran in and out of giant rock formations. I started to feel like I was shooting the rapids. Or at least on one of those fast-twirling carnival rides.

Suddenly, the narrow channel opened up into a huge cave, and I went surging out into the mid-air like a goldfish being poured out of a bowl. Below was a giant swirling whirlpool that was sucking everything down into itself like some kind of a monster drain. I only caught a glimpse of Pearl going down before I fell in and got sucked into it myself.

So fast I didn't even have time to holler.

*“The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.”*

Albert Einstein

## BEYOND EINSTEIN

It was like some giant vacuum was pulling us down and down into a terrible dark. And it was cold. They say your whole life passes in front of you like instant replay, just before you die. Only mine didn't. Just before I thought I couldn't hold my breath a second longer, I felt myself being shot up toward the surface like a cork popping out of a bottle.

*Whoosh!*

I came up splashing and sputtering in the middle of a big lake. I knew it was a lake because I could see land around it. And it was freezing!

“Pearl!” I choked, trying to catch my breath. “Pearl!”

All of a sudden, I felt two strong arms pull me up out of the water from behind. The next thing I knew, I was sitting—dripping wet—in the bottom of a wooden

rowboat, with fishing poles and tackle all around.

Pearl was sitting there, too—alive! She was shivering, and her teeth were chattering, even though she was wrapped in a red wool blanket. I turned around to see who had saved us, and at the same time, heard a familiar voice.

“Well done, my boy—well done!” and felt a blanket being wrapped around me, too.

“Dr. Finkelstein!” I felt my own teeth chattering. “How did—when did—oh, Dr. Finkelstein!”

He was dressed warm in a plaid shirt and wool pants, and was wearing a green felt hat with fishing flies stuck into it. But it was the Professor, all right. There was that bushy white mustache, and I’d have recognized those piercing blue eyes anywhere.

“One moment, Peter,” he said (like he rescued kids out of whirlpools every day), “we’ve got one more fish to catch!”

Just then, Casey popped up alongside the boat, coughing and sputtering as the Professor scooped him on board, too.

“There!” He unfolded another blanket for Casey. “All the Young Scientifics, present and accounted for!”

“B-but what about Jim?” Casey had a hard time talking through his chattering teeth. “We—can’t just—I-leave him there! He wouldn’t understand. He’ll wait there for me, Professor. I’m responsible for him and he won’t understand!”

“Oh, no need to worry about Jim, my boy,” said the Professor. “He’s a lot smarter than you think.” He

reached for a big thermos under one of the seats then, and poured each of us a steaming mug full of...

Hot chocolate!

I never tasted anything so good in my life. It warmed me right down to my toes. “Where are we, Professor?” I looked around. “I don’t recognize this place.”

“I’d be surprised if you did.” He sat down on one of the benches then, and reached to fit two oars into the locks. “You are in Scotland. On a little lake in the north country called Loch Ness, in the year 1895.”

For a minute, not a one of us could say a word. Not one word until Pearl blurted out, “Loch Ness—holy macaroni—that’s where the monster lives!”

I guess the fact we were floating there in the year 1895, had gone past her.

“Oh, no monster,” the Professor assured, starting to row. “It’s just that every once in awhile, one of the aquatic dinosaurs gets caught in the whirlpool and slips through the passageway. But it’s far too cold for them to survive very long. And the lake is too deep and murky to find them when they die.”

“That’s sad,” whispered Pearl, and then blew on her chocolate to cool it down.

“It only happens on rare occasions to be sure,” the Professor explained. “Just enough to make people think the place is haunted. In this century, that is. In the next, they’ll come up with a new explanation for the phenomenon.”

Something about the way he was rowing didn’t



match with the way we were gliding so smooth through the water. “Well, boys...” He smiled. “It took you longer to get here than I expected. But then I understand you were given some extra responsibilities.”

I looked over at Pearl, and then down at the pterodactyl bones bulging out of my pocket in plain sight. They had turned back to the color of stone again. No use acting like we had kept all the secrets.

Casey wasn't much better. He had the string of his leather pouch around his neck, and the thing was hanging—dripping wet against his vest—for the whole world to see. But I don't think he noticed, on account of he was still so worried about Jim.

“Can't we wait here a little longer, Professor?” he asked, staring behind us as we pulled away. “Maybe Jim will pop up.”

“Put your mind at rest,” answered the Professor, “and let me explain. You children have managed to come through in a single afternoon, what took me years to figure out. You see, when I first stumbled into that time passage along with the Sutter Expedition —”

“So, they did disappear!” I interrupted.

“Indeed they did,” he went on. “I was only fifteen then, and I had an experience quite similar to the ones you've had today. Except that I alone ended up in the whirlpool, and fetched up into this very lake.”

He stopped rowing, only we kept gliding right on through the water, anyway. And the oars kept moving all by themselves. The three of us must have looked silly—all staring with our mouths open—but we had

never seen anything like it before.

“We have to keep up appearances for the townspeople,” the Professor explained. “They think I’m a retired Professor gone fishing. Now, where was I?”

“In the lake,” I replied.

“Ah, yes. I swam to shore, and a nice gentleman who owned a dairy farm in Glen Heron, took me in. It’s a little town not far from here.”

“Glen Heron!” murmured Casey, like things were finally sinking in.

“You see,” said the Professor, “I knew something cosmic had happened! But I had no idea how to get back. Or if it was even possible. I tried to be grateful I was alive and make a life for myself here. But I—like you, Casey—had left those I cared for behind. And that’s how my research began.”

He opened the Thermos again, and refilled our mugs before going on. “I kept coming back to the mountain, knowing it held secrets, but not knowing how to unlock them. Spent years exploring it. I discovered the energy field, but not much more. And I certainly didn’t know how to use any of it.”

He paused and then held up a finger. “Ah, but then an idea struck! The shape of the mountain had changed since the Prehistoric era, and water levels had risen considerably. I realized then, that the passageway I was searching for was beneath the water now, not above it. So, I had to build a submarine.”

“A submarine!” I gasped. “How did you do that?”

Even Casey was amazed, and started listening with

two ears instead of one. Pearl just kept sipping on her chocolate.

“Oh, it wasn’t that difficult, since I came from an age when they were already invented. My problem was with the fuel. Wood, coal, and whale oil was all anyone had around here. Which was all too bulky and messy. But by that time, I knew of a place where a different kind of energy was at work.”

“The Polarity Theory!” Casey guessed.

“Precisely,” replied the Professor. “That was the start of it all. I built a magnificent submarine. Better than the kind you have even in your day. And through my explorations, I discovered not only one passageway, but many. They’re all over the earth. Stationary time and space tunnels—some small and some large. And some that can even get you from one end to the other of the universe in record time. Quite well-hidden, too. Unless you know what to look for. Or, like the aquatic dinosaurs, someone happens to stumble into one by accident. Which also happens from time to time.”

“Did you ever find your way back, Professor?” I was wondering if he ever found his family, again.

“Oh, yes, indeed. But by that time, many years had gone by. They’d had two world wars and entered an age of war.”

He shook his head sadly at the thought. “War was all anyone seemed to think about. While I had discovered the Polarity Theory, they had discovered oil. Which turned the tide of the entire age. And a terrible tide it’s been, I’m afraid.”

“Wouldn’t anyone listen to you?” I asked.

“I never got to the place where I could share it. For awhile I thought the space exploration program would rescue the human race out of that terrible cycle. That’s why I got involved with the lunar buggy project. But it wasn’t to be! While the public thought we were exploring new fields of science, we were really developing new weapons, and new ways to fire them from space.”

“Gosh,” whispered Casey.

“In the end, I readjusted my calculations on the buggy so my theory couldn’t be traced, and returned to my own peaceful laboratory beneath the mountain.”

“Beneath the mountain?” I figured we must have passed right by it.

“Beneath the mountain in 1895,” he corrected. “Unlike the substation under the museum, no one can find this one. Unless they are invited.”

“But we failed our mission!” Casey said sadly. “Just look at us--we couldn’t even keep the secrets!”

“Failed your mission—my dear children—you’ve passed with flying colors! You still have the things I gave you?”

We both nodded.

“Haven’t bartered them for fame and fortune, have you?”

“Oh, no!” we both answered at the same time.

“Of course you haven’t,” he said with a pleased smile.

“Even when your own welfare was on the line. You

see we had to stage that little episode about being trapped in the basement, as a sort of test. To see if you would give in if times got tough. Ah, but you didn't! And what's more, the way you've taken care of each other, stuck together, and remained brave and noble along the way... why, it's renewed my faith in human nature!"

"But what about Pearl?" I asked.

"I'm gonna be a naturalist," Pearl licked a drip down the side of her cup. "That's what Aunt Bill says."

"Splendid," the Professor replied. "And wait until you see some of the secrets I have in store for you."

"You mean Pearl gets to be a Young Scientific, too?" I was amazed. But Pearl seemed to be taking it like it was planned that way from the beginning.

"Of course." said the Professor. "Along with that brave little companion of yours, Jim Dandy. Genius and bravery added to nobility makes for the best kind of team. Together we shall start a new kind of school, in search of a new kind of science. Based on peace and truth. A truth that goes... beyond Einstein."

"But I got to be back by five-thirty," said Pearl.

"Oh, you will always be back by five-thirty," he promised. "Thanks to the *Intrepid*."

"Gosh!" Casey jumped up so fast his blanket dropped off. "You mean the *Intrepid* is here? And we get to go back for Jim?"

"No need to go back," said the Professor. "He's here, already."

He pulled open a trap door in the bottom of the

*Return to the Dinosaur Planet*

rowboat. There was a little stairway circling down... right into the command center of the *Intrepid!* And there was Jim, standing down at the bottom, saluting us like a regular soldier. Already wearing an Alpha Band of his own! “Come along, children,” said the Professor cheerfully, “we have many adventures ahead of us. And a much bigger and better future to take care of than we have ever dreamed.”

“The future?” I could hardly believe it. “We still get to help with the future?”

“Help? Why, my boy...you children are the future!”

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## About Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein was the most famous scientist of our times. So famous, that his name is interchangeable with the word genius. But he said many times that he wasn't so much smarter than everybody else, just more curious about things. And he spent a lot more time trying to figure out problems than most people do.

He did most of his thinking by using his imagination, and often said he thought more in pictures than words. Which was probably a characteristic he was born with, because he did it from an early age. So much, that he didn't actually start talking until about the age of three. Which is much later than most kids. His parents were a little worried about that, and even took him to a doctor to see if there might be something wrong with his brain. But there wasn't.

In fact, when it came to thinking, he was actually ahead of most kids. For instance, when he was five-years-old, his father gave him a compass. When he saw how the needle moved, he knew right away there must be some invisible force pulling on it. Those sort of thoughts fascinated him all his life. They eventually led him to come up with the most famous formula ever

discovered:  $E=mc^2$ . Better known as the Theory of Relativity.

Albert Einstein presented his most famous theory to the world when he was still in his twenties. Which was amazingly young for discovering such deep scientific stuff. But considering how young he was when he first started thinking about those things, he had already spent a long time on it. Not to mention he was inventing models and mechanical devices just for fun when he was only a boy. This might not sound so special to kids, these days, but when Albert was a boy, pioneers were still heading west in covered wagons over here in America.

Early thoughts on relativity also popped up in an essay he sent to his uncle at the age of fifteen, in which he described the magnetic effects of an electric current on the area surrounding the actual wire... stuff that confuses almost everybody, these days. Including adults. But if there is anything to be learned by taking a closer look at Albert Einstein's early life, it would have to be the realization of how important it is to actually think about things.

People who make a practice of taking time to think deeply about things (especially children), often end up being leaders of the next generation. That's because the brain is a most amazing tool. Capable of even more than our most advanced computer systems. If only we would turn it on more often and start "imputing" interesting data into it!

Did you know that when Albert Einstein died (at the



age of 76), someone actually stole his brain? They wanted to find out if the most famous genius in the world had a different brain than most people. A more advanced one, maybe. But it turned out he had only used his more, which led to a more developed one. That it was... nothing but an ordinary brain, after all.

## About Cousin Summers

Cousin Summers (the Mysterious) has lived up in a lighthouse on Summers Island for longer than anyone can remember. But it doesn't matter that no one remembers when the stories started. The important thing is the lighthouse is where they all come from.

You might be wondering where the mysterious part comes in. It is because Cousin Summers is a shy person (and busy, too), who spends so much time writing stories up in the lighthouse that a lot of rumors have started. Which is all we need to say about that, because we know where rumors come from. Sometimes there's a little truth to them, too. Either way, you will have to decide for yourself.

What is known for certain is that Cousin Summers (the Mysterious) does not mind sharing the island with readers who find their way there. Oh, yes, and you will occasionally see Miss Lilly there (the light housekeeper who only does light housework). She can answer questions you might have about Cousin Summers, but you have to be polite to her. Then there's the Captain, who has lived long enough to know something about everything. He talks to anyone who will listen, regardless of whether they are polite or not.

There are others on the island, too. But that's enough for now.

*Cousin Summers*

ALSO BY COUSIN SUMMERS

*The Young Heroics*

Book One

**KNIGHTS OF THE EMPIRE**

(middle grade)

*The Young Scientifics*

Book One

**RETURN TO THE DINOSAUR PLANET**

(middle grade)

*Kids On Assignment*

Book One

**THE KIDNAPPING OF MARY**

(young adult)